

The Heart of Jesus of Nazareth



Meditations on the Hidden Life

Mediation 1 - Grandeur of the Hidden Life

The period of our Lord's Life on earth which still remains least known even to many devout souls, is that which He spent in the retirement of Nazareth.

Devotion to the Sacred Passion, or even to the Divine Infancy is more or less prevalent, and yet it is too often only very superficially understood. But the mysteries of the Hidden Life, although it occupied the greater portion of the three-and-thirty years, is well-nigh a sealed book, or at least it is a volume of which the pages have scarcely been turned over. When we ask ourselves why it is so, the answer comes to us without much difficulty.

The generality of minds find nothing attractive in that which bears upon its surface the character of monotony, nothing great in that which fails to wear a brilliant appearance. Men will not take the trouble to seek a treasure which is hidden beneath a common-place exterior, and hence the Hidden Life of Nazareth, putting forward no brilliant show, marked by no externally striking incidents, has but little attraction for those who know not how to recognize grandeur in abasement, or who care not to seek what is supernatural and Divine when it is veiled under a common and every-day life appearance.

It is true that the natural craving of the human heart seeks to attain to something great. In fact the misapplication of this imperious necessity is that which causes the fearful state of the world at the present day. Many a fall has doubtless begun in the yearning of the heart after some apparently greater work than that which lay within its grasp.

False lights have been followed, and souls, losing in those cases the right track, have drifted away and been shipwrecked on the rocks of pride and infidelity. Whereas others, directed by a similar yearning, have followed the true light, and have found in the imitation of the Life of Jesus Christ the real greatness which their souls were seeking. Many a high vocation has probably been abandoned because the soul did not grasp the truth that the humility, obedience, and self-annihilation which were demanded of it placed within its reach the very means requisite for attaining the most sublime of all ends that it could propose to itself.

This seems to have been the thought of Saint Ignatius, when, in the striking contemplation of "The Kingdom of Christ," which has inspired countless souls with contempt for the world, and has led them to enroll themselves under the only banner worthy of their nobility as brethren and co-heirs with Christ, he remarks that everything in the enterprise to which we are invited is great. The same may be said of the Hidden Life, that school wherein we learn to become truly great, inasmuch as it constantly places before us in our Lord the most perfect end to aim at in all our actions, and the highest of all examples to guide our interior intentions.

The Model proposed to us is the Incarnate Wisdom Himself; the means for attaining our end is the practice of the virtues and the adoption of the aspirations and desires of His Sacred Heart; the end itself is the same as that which brought Him down from Heaven, for which He lived and died; our companions should be the saints of every age for whom Nazareth has ever been at once a school and a dwelling of predilection for their souls.

The very limited attention, then, which even the greater number of pious persons give to this portion of our Lord's

Life must be attributed to the absence of that spirit of faith which enables us to pierce the veils and to discern true greatness beneath what in the eyes of human wisdom appears contemptible.

This same absence of attraction may be accounted for by the monotonous character which each year externally presents. The restless thirst for something exciting and "sensational" which now penetrates even into matters of religion, here finds no satisfaction. Hence it is that the name of Nazareth, which to souls who have dwelt much in thought and affection with Jesus in His years of solitude awakens such thrilling memories, and elicits such burning acts of love, falls coldly and without significance on the ears of many, for whose sake, nevertheless, He chose to bear that title, at once so despised and so glorious: Jesus Nazarenus, Jesus of Nazareth.

We must, then, in order to give ourselves efficaciously to the meditation of the Hidden Life of Jesus, in the first place disabuse our minds of that false judgment which would lead us to esteem only that which displays its utility and its greatness upon the surface. In the next place we must remember that the life of Jesus at Nazareth is, in more senses than one, His Hidden Life. It is pre-eminently His interior life there that we wish to study - the life of His Sacred Heart; and it is precisely in that light that it forms a fitting subject for the closest attention of all those who claim to be numbered amongst the lovers of the Sacred Heart, and whose desire it is to know it more profoundly, in order that they may love it more intensely.

It is not sufficient to read of the exterior actions which our Blessed Lord performed, or of the exterior sufferings to which He submitted. These are, it is true, the outward expressions of the love which inwardly consumed Him. But a

far more perfect knowledge of the character of Jesus will be obtained by him who through prayer and meditation shall penetrate into the source within, whence flowed every action He wrought and every word He uttered, than can ever be reached by the soul which regards only the exterior - however full of meaning and expression as in the Person of our Lord that exterior may have been.

There were those who, while He was on earth, beheld His works and heard His words, and were in no way touched by them. The thoughts and intentions which moved Him in acting, speaking, and suffering remained hidden from them, their ignorance being in great measure an effect of their willful blindness, as it is written: "If you will not believe, you shall not understand." (Isaias 7:9, Septuagint Version.)

The same may be said of a number of persons at the present day. The outward expression of the humility, patience, obedience, and other virtues of our Lord, together with that of His love for His Heavenly Father and for men, makes little impression upon us, because we are, through our own indifference, strangers to the living furnace of love within His breast. Thus we fail to recognize in what we read of Jesus the true character of His words and actions, the manifestation of His inmost desires and yearnings - the throbbing of His Heart for us.

All that has been said applies in a special manner to the portion of our Lord's Life which He passed at Nazareth. The very monotony, the daily round of commonplace duties and ordinary actions necessitates our penetrating into the hidden source, wherein is to be found the motive for the prolonged hidden life of One who had such a stupendous work before Him to accomplish on earth, and who allowed Himself so short a space in which to fulfill it.

Let us, then, in our love towards the Sacred Heart, endeavour to become more intimately acquainted with its life at Nazareth, so that, charmed with the marvels we shall there discover, we may be filled with desire to act and suffer with the same motives and intentions that led to the actions and sufferings of Jesus, and thus arrive in time at a more just appreciation of the true character and blessed fruits of a life formed on the model of the Hidden Life at Nazareth.

Meditation 2 - Meaning and Design of the Hidden Life

There are two ways of understanding what is called a hidden life. From one point of view it is simply a life withdrawn from the busy world - from the society of men. In this sense it bears no essential sanctity, and is a mode of life chosen by many who have no acquaintance with the nature of holiness, such as the Pagan philosophers and others, who withdrew from the society of their fellow-men merely as the result of their own natural inclination, and in pursuit of a purely natural object. Under another point of view a hidden life means distinctly one led by each person in the solitude of his own heart, and it is this alone which imparts sanctity and value to that external and material seclusion which, for the most part, the world understands by the term "hidden life."

It is under this second aspect that we are about to regard our Lord Jesus Christ in His solitude at Nazareth, learning of Him that the sanctity and merit of our whole outer life depends on the intentions, the motives - in a word, the life of the Sacred Heart itself. Have we ever asked ourselves, For what do I live? Placed as I am in the midst of society, have I at heart any higher aim, or any end more worthy of a Christian than the gratification of self, or the possession of some temporal interest?

If I am a Religious do I live for that which is the end and object of the Order to which I belong? - just as every aspiration, every beat of the Heart of Jesus was directed towards the object which brought Him down from Heaven. Or is it still - perhaps unconsciously - self that I am seeking under the mask of a religious life?

We know that the sole aim of our Lord in coming down upon earth was the reparation of the Divine glory and the salvation of the world. We can have no doubt as to the infallibility of the means He took for accomplishing this end. Nevertheless, it is with astonishment perhaps, that we behold Him passing nearly the whole of His mortal career in solitude, employed in the most ordinary occupations, and withholding the manifestation of any of those marvelous deeds which we should imagine could alone be in proportion to so sublime an end.

Jesus, the Eternal Wisdom, knew that the lives of the greater part of men would be passed in a routine of ordinary actions, according to their state, and He foresaw the necessity of teaching them how to sanctify this common life generally so little esteemed or understood, as well as of correcting in them the universal error which imagines that only those actions are meritorious or worthy of admiration which are great or brilliant in themselves.

Have we not been sometimes tempted to consider our state of life an excuse for doing nothing for God's glory or for the promotion of His interests? If we are in Religion, have we not deluded ourselves with the idea that the material and commonplace nature of the employments confided to us are an obstacle to our labouring for God, and to our union with Him by prayer and recollection? Let us fix our thoughts upon Jesus of Nazareth, and ask ourselves whether the uninteresting character of His Life in that obscure home was any impediment to the accomplishment of the one great work which He had ever in His Heart, or to the union of His Heart with that Eternal Father to whose love it ever corresponded.

Meditation 3 - The Utility and Consolation Which the Hidden Life of Jesus Christ Affords Us

Notwithstanding the magnitude of the external work for which our Lord came down upon earth, He led the life of a recluse, up to three short years before He closed His mortal career, exercising the lowly trade of a carpenter in the obscurity of Nazareth. Let us linger longer on this reflection, pregnant with matter for years of meditation and with utility and consolation for ourselves.

It discloses to us, in the first place, that no state of life - no occupation - no deprivation of those things which the world esteems great, and which the natural man highly values, need form an obstacle to our co-operation with the Divine Mission of Jesus Christ on earth. Had He spent the whole or the greater part of His Life in working miracles, in preaching, in bearing testimony to His Divinity in various ways during the short time of His Public Ministry, we might indeed have hesitated to associate ourselves with a work so far beyond and above us. Had He placed before us but the example of the terrible sufferings of His Passion, we might justly have persuaded ourselves that our frailty could not attain to the imitation of so exalted a model. But it is Jesus of Nazareth who invites us to contemplate Him during the long years of His Hidden Life, and to learn of Him the lessons He will so gently teach us. He asks us but to clothe ourselves with His Spirit, to form our hearts on His, in order to enable us to participate in His Mission, whatever may be our state of life.

It is not simply the exterior of our Blessed Lord that we are about to consider. It is, above all, the life of His Sacred Heart in the solitude of Nazareth which forms the chief matter for

our meditation, and in that lie abundant consolation and instruction.

Our state of life may be one with which the actions we behold Jesus performing in Joseph's workshop are not compatible, but are we for that reason precluded from the imitation of His virtues, from appropriating to ourselves the spirit which animated His Sacred Heart, from adopting as our own the intentions for which He lived and laboured? Not so. The Heart of Jesus was the same in every phase of His Life, and the object of that Heart's devotedness never changed. Whether He planed wood at Nazareth, or wrought miracles in Judea, the glory of His Father and the salvation of the world were the one aim ever kept in view. What an immense source of consolation for countless hearts would this thought be if only they could be made to grasp it: "I, too, can live and act for the same great end, regardless of the sphere of life in which Providence has placed me, and of the exterior actions which my state of life requires of me."

We know that it is the spirit which animates our works, that renders them precious in the sight of God, or otherwise. He asks not from us those which are beyond our reach. He does not desire any that would oblige us to do violence to the circumstances with which He has Himself surrounded us. He would fain possess our hearts, He yearns to be the final end of all their aspirations, of all their intentions, so that His interests may be the main-spring of all our outward acts. This He seeks throughout the world, amongst rich and poor, learned and ignorant, secular and religious alike; and the souls in whom He finds the closest union of sentiment with the Heart of the Great Solitary of Nazareth will be found best disposed for receiving His choicest benedictions. And they will not deem it the least of these benedictions that they are enabled to sanctify the duties of their state, whatever it may be?

Yes, dear lovers of the Heart of Jesus, many of whom are perhaps weighed down with the fear that you have it not within your power to do anything great for God, go to Nazareth, and learn of the Heart of Jesus how to render your lives holy not only with a view to your own sanctification, but also to their fruitfulness for God's glory. Your actions, even the most indifferent in themselves, will thus become ennobled, made almost Divine, because, by reason of your union with the Heart of Jesus, the sap of true spiritual life will be infused into the spirit which animates them.

Meditation 4 - Of the Presence of God Considered in the Hidden Life

If there is one exercise which conduces more efficaciously than another to our sanctification, it is assuredly that of the presence of God. If one means be more conducive than another to attain that holy exercise, it would seem to be a true and solid devotion to the Heart of Jesus. His most holy Soul, being united to the Word, never lost the view of the Beatific Vision, although the beatitude and the joy of that Vision were by a miracle withheld from overflowing into the lower functions of His Soul, in order that He might be able to suffer in His Humanity.

The nearest resemblance to our Lord which some of the saints have attained in this respect may be found in such transient glimpses of the Divine Beauty as we find revealed in their lives. With those extraordinary ways by which God sometimes vouchsafes to visit a few favoured souls we have nothing to do at present. When we speak, therefore, in this meditation, of the habitual presence of God we refer but to that union of the soul with Him which was ordinary in the saints, and which may be attained - in more or less degree - by faithful correspondence with grace.

Our facility in maintaining the Divine presence will be measured by the extent of our knowledge of God, since in proportion to our knowledge of Him will be our love, and it is love that keeps us in the recollection of His presence, and that impels us to think of Him and of all that relates to Him. This the Heart of Jesus teaches us. His Soul saw God. It knew Him with a knowledge that no other soul but His could have supported. His love equaled His knowledge, and it was in the mysterious light of such knowledge and such love that He

walked on earth - never alone, even in the midst of the most cruel abandonment on the part of creatures (John 16:32) - and He was never forsaken, even when given up to the pangs of supreme agony and dereliction.

That which proved the consolation of the human Heart of Jesus, and after Him of all His saints, may be the same in the case of each one of us. Let us but apply ourselves to know God's beauty and to hear His voice, and our hearts will quickly learn to turn towards Him, to seek His face, and delight in His presence. The consciousness of that presence will then become an abiding source of tranquil devotion and of peace of heart, if not of sensible joy. It will greet us, at our first awakening, with encouragement to commence another day of trial; it will follow us amidst our occupations, console us in our sorrows, support us in our temptations, until we shall sink to rest, when the day is over, in the bosom of that Father whom we have felt so near to us, and whose presence will be our last thought, lulling us to sleep in the calm consciousness of His protection.

As the appreciation of the excellence of this holy exercise increases, the soul finds more facility and more charm in occupying itself with God, and becomes, by degrees, more familiar with the thought of Him. It will love to recall the Gospel narratives of the Life of our Blessed Lord. It will in time learn to feel at home, as it were, amongst them, and thus it will be enabled to make for itself a solitude, a hidden life apart from the material life which externally surrounds it. This habit the Sacred Scripture calls "walking with God," for by it we make Him our companion here below.

It is of this habitual dwelling in the Divine presence that Jesus affords us so perfect a model in the Holy House of Nazareth.

Let us now consider the fruits of constant attention to the Divine presence, which are first produced in the heart, and from thence reflected throughout the whole life.

The Soul of Jesus looked ever upon the Father's Face, and as He looked the flames of love rose ever higher within His Sacred Heart. This is the testimony which He gives of Himself: "He that sent Me is with Me, and He hath not left Me alone; for I do always the things that please Him." (John 8:29)

If a servant, from the motive of fear, performs with care and attention those things which please his master, when he is conscious of that master's presence, how much more will the faithful soul do this from a motive of love in the presence of our Father in Heaven. Such will be the first result of this holy exercise. The more habitually it is practised, the more constant also will be the practice of virtue, since the soul's first desire will be to "do always the things that please" the Divine object of its love, of whose presence it is so conscious.

It must be remarked, however, that the actions which flow from this holy recollection in God have in them nothing forced, nothing constrained. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2nd Corinthians 3:17) The heart and mind are really where their treasure is, that is, in God and in those things which refer to His honour and glory; and this is true recollection, widely different from that studied and simply external modesty which is often exaggerated, which is maintained with effort, and which is perhaps sometimes assumed through spiritual vanity. When the interior eye has been really attracted by the Divine Beauty, exterior objects lose their charm, and are held in regard only so far as duty and charity demand. When the inward ear habitually listens to the Divine whisper, silence is then a joy and no longer a

constraint. Habitual reverence will manifest itself in the whole exterior - a gentle, spontaneous, and unconscious reverence flowing from the union of the soul with God, and from the tranquil happiness which it experiences in the presence of its treasure.

Let us, then, beg a lively faith in the Divine presence, and the grace to acquire the sanctifying habit of walking in it continually, so that with truth we may say to God: "I am always with Thee." Then will virtues flourish in our souls beneath that genial influence, like flowers beneath the sun. Thus shall we grow in likeness to Jesus and make advance in our union with His Sacred Heart.

Meditation 5 - Happiness of the Heart of Jesus in the Hidden Life

Where there is union of heart with God there must be happiness, because the essential element of happiness is present there, no matter what may be the circumstances in which that life is cast.

We intend in this meditation to reflect on some of the sources of happiness, wherein we ourselves may share with the human Heart of God. In the beginning, when He had finished the work of creation, Holy Scripture tells us that "God saw all the things that He had made, and they were very good." (Genesis 1:31) These words are suggestive of the Divine complacency in the beautiful work accomplished, and we recognize a reproduction of this sublime joy of the Creator in the appreciation with which the Heart of Jesus contemplated the works of Nature.

The perception of the beautiful is a Divine lineament which sin has never been able utterly to efface from the human soul, but which is more strikingly developed in proportion to that purity of heart which imparts discernment as to the source from whence all created beauty emanates: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." Now what heart was ever comparable in purity and singleness to the human Heart of the Man-God.

Hence it is that Jesus, walking amidst the fair scenes of Nazareth, could appreciate with an intensity unknown to us, all the loveliness His eye beheld; just as years afterwards, when, fatigued with the labours of the day, He found refreshment on the shaded slopes of Olivet, and holy joy as

His eye wandered over the blue waters of Genesereth, sparkling in the sunlight.

He rejoiced, we say, in these things because His Heart was full of all that was Divine, because He saw in them at once the expression of the Divine Beauty and the creation of the Divine hand; because His Heart was pure and single, and therefore as it sought but God, and desired but God, so it found Him everywhere. Lastly, He rejoiced in all creation, inasmuch as He saw in it the work of His own hand by reason of His unity of operation with the Father, resulting from the unity of the Divine Nature.

The example of our Lord, as far as He is imitable for us, was needed in this respect, for two reasons. First, in order to teach us how it is that the beautiful works of God may be for us means of raising our souls to God Himself, and of dilating our hearts with love of Him; and secondly, as a condemnation of that false spirituality which would make indifference to the beautiful in the works of God an evidence of advanced sanctity. Better inspired have been those numerous saints to whose pure hearts a lovely flower or some fair scene of earth has revealed the Eternal Beauty, for the full and unveiled possession of whom their pure and free souls were panting.

The love of the Father was that all-absorbing impulse in the Heart of Jesus, which in the heart of a simple creature would have taken the form of a passion. What other result could come from this than that every mark of the Father's handiwork should flood His Soul with joy? So it will be with us. In proportion to our purity of heart and our love of God, will be our capacity for a spiritual appreciation of the beautiful works which are but emanations from Himself.

If the Heart of our Divine Lord found such well-springs of happiness in the contemplation of those works in the natural order which were to His eye revelations, or rather the abiding presence of the Eternal beauty, wisdom, love, and other attributes, what shall be said of its complacency in those of the order of grace? We are about to meditate on the complacency of the Heart of Jesus as reflected in that of His ever Immaculate Mother.

As He regarded that Mother's face, He saw the beauty of the spotless soul reflected therein, and His Heart rejoiced in that masterpiece of spiritual loveliness, in the consideration of that singular privilege which elevated her so far above all other creatures. He rejoiced, moreover, in that other special prerogative of hers - her Divine Maternity. The memory of that word by which she had consented to become His Mother, and thus the sharer of His sorrows, and His helper in the work of man's redemption, made sweet melody to His Heart as He watched her moving reverently before Him in her lowly occupations. But, above all, He rejoiced in her sublime humility, by which, ascribing to God alone every grace she had received, and desiring to employ them but for His glory, she rendered that homage to His sovereignty of which so many of His creatures defraud Him. Jesus, then, in the House of Nazareth is our first great Exemplar of devotion to His ever Blessed Mother, and of the consolation which those possess who truly love her.

But He opens for us, in His Hidden Life, another source of consolation. He would teach us how to sanctify the strongest of human ties, and that nothing more purifies the soul than the tender, reverential love of a child for his mother. This is a tie surpassing every other in the order of nature in intimacy, in strength, in beautiful associations. Those who have grown hardened in sin have been reclaimed by vividly recalling to

their world-worn minds some long-forgotten memory of the mother whose heart perhaps they had broken.

Jesus has sanctified for ever this filial tie, and whilst discovering to us, in His love for His own Blessed Mother, one of the sources of happiness to His Sacred Heart, He becomes our Model, not only of devotion to her, but also of the reverential love with which we should regard our human mother. In the evil days through which we pass, the beneficial effect of so hallowing an influence over the hearts, not only of the very young, but also of those on whom the world has put forth its noxious breath, would be incalculable.

There are, again, those who seem imbued with the false notion that piety is incompatible with human enjoyment, and hence, as we have shown before, that the enjoyment of human things is incompatible with sanctity. Our Lord has disabused us of this error, and by example taken from His Sacred Heart has taught, to those at least who know how to penetrate its depths, that its spirit is sweet, sanctifying what is human, and elevating it into being in part Divine.

Meditation 6 - Occupation of the Heart of Jesus in the Hidden Life

We are not at present going to study in detail the holy occupations of the Heart of our Lord, reserving such study for future consideration in separate meditations. We shall find that it affords much assistance in familiarizing us with the character of the Sacred Heart, its love, its sufferings, and its desires. It will enable us also to recognize how full of merit, how conducive to God's glory, and how helpful to the world at large is a hidden life provided it be modelled on the Hidden Life of Jesus.

The exterior life of Nazareth was, as we know, made up of the most ordinary works, the most commonplace actions. During those long years we find nothing apparently in due proportion to the sublime Mission which brought Him down from Heaven. Yet He was all the while negotiating the great affair of our redemption as truly as when we come to regard Him hanging on the Cross. Let us penetrate into His Heart, and we shall see that it was secretly consumed with love in the presence of the Majesty of God - His Father; and, since true love is ever active, with what energy must not the Divine flame have burnt within that living Furnace of Charity?

It was from this inexhaustible source of love that every act of His emanated, and these have merited the redemption of ten thousand worlds, and are pleading at this moment our cause in Heaven.

Behold the first great Master of the Divine Apostleship. Behold in Jesus of Nazareth the first apostle of prayer! This was the occupation of His Sacred Heart. He loved, He

adored, He repaired, He prayed, He immolated Himself for the Father's glory, for the salvation of the universe. He traced out the Divine plan of His Church, according to the eternal design He had seen in the bosom of the Father, and as each stratagem of His enemy for the defeat of that plan and the overthrow of His Church passed before Him, He devised the infallible means by which the evil influence should be counteracted, and the cause of good should triumph.

Of what importance was it that the hands of Jesus did but plane wood in a carpenter's shop whilst His Heart was thus incessantly and divinely occupied? Could there really be monotony in such a life as this? Whatever may have been its exterior, the interior of that life was the most sublime that can be imagined.

Sublime also is the hidden life of those who have learnt to imitate Him, whose hearts, like His, are wholly occupied, as far as they can be in this life, with the interests of God and of souls; a life indeed which the wise ones of this world despise - which materialists scorn as useless. But in the great day of revelation they will be forced to exclaim: "We fools esteemed their life madness and their end without honour; behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints."

And now let us look into our own interior, and examine the thoughts and desires that succeed each other incessantly throughout the day. To whom, to what, do they relate? To Him who gave us understanding in order that we might know and contemplate Him, a heart but to love Him, faculties of soul and body but to serve Him with? Or do we not rather concentrate our thoughts, at least for the most part, on self, on our own personal interests, wishes, and affairs, or on those of the limited circle of beings who come

within our sphere, and between whom and ourselves perhaps only natural ties exist? The trials of the Church, the loss of souls, the darkness in which the poor heathen are sitting for want of missionaries to bear to them the light of truth, the revolt of nations from their allegiance to God and His Vicar, besides many other like interests all so intimately involving the glory of God, are these the objects which occupy our hearts and minds, which are so constituted that they must be incessantly occupied with something?

If the love of God is burning in our breasts, our hearts, as that of Jesus, will, in proportion to the strength of our love, be more or less occupied with His interests rather than with what pleases ourselves, and we shall find no cause to complain of the monotony of our lives, whatever may be the nature of our exterior employments. Oh, no! This hidden life proposed to us is not a dreamy inactivity, whether it be cultivated in the midst of the world, or embraced beneath the sacred shadow of the cloister. It is, on the contrary, full of life - the true life of the heart; and the more fully God and all that concerns Him occupy our hearts and minds, the wider, the more elevated will they become, and consequently more capable of attaining the noble end proposed to them, which is nothing less sublime than co-operation with the Divine Mission of the Incarnate Word.

In the hidden life thus regarded there is no selfishness, no egotism; it is essentially a life of generous devotedness. Thus we shall find herein an antidote for the two grievous evils of the present age - idleness of thought and frivolity of heart. In proportion as the soul is occupied with God and with His interests, will it be ever "giving of its substance," that is, immolating its natural inclinations on the altar of Divine love, for the glory of God and the good of souls. What is the secret source of the weariness, the discontent, the disquietude of innumerable souls who give themselves to

piety, and who aspire to the interior life? It is that Jesus of Nazareth is not their model; it is that they have not suffered Him to be their Master, and His Sacred Heart their school; it is that they seek in piety their own satisfaction, their own interests, instead of making God and the advancement of His Kingdom the primary object of their thoughts and desires.

There can be for them no joy of spirit, no true peace of heart, because they are not accomplishing the work that was destined for them, the only work which can fill up and relieve the monotony of their life, for monotonous and wearisome it must be to those whose hearts do not beat in unison with the Heart of Jesus, and which are not occupied with the thoughts, the intentions, the aspirations of His Heart.

On the other hand, for those who live the life of the Heart of Jesus, who, in union with Him, exercise the Divine Apostleship, the hidden life presents no weariness, no tediousness. Their hearts, that were once perhaps filled with a thousand vain pre-occupations and desires, or dragged on a mere existence, devoid of any special aim, have at length begun to live. They have learnt to love God and therefore to think much of Him, to desire with ardour all that can glorify Him and enable the Passion and Death of His only Son to bear all their fruits. Their horizon has become more extended, their thoughts more elevated, their hearts have grown larger, the petty interests and trivial cares that once absorbed them have lost their charm for them, and their hold upon them; they can act and suffer now for a definite and noble end, and they have so much to think of in the cause of God and of souls that they have no time to spend in thinking about self. It is thus that lives become self-forgetting, devoted, according to the Heart of Jesus, and through union with Him are hidden in God.

Meditation 7 - The Heart of Jesus in Prayer

Let us imagine we see Jesus kneeling in the little House of Nazareth, His sacred hands reverently clasped, His eyes closed or raised to heaven. We have before us the Incarnate God praying to His Eternal Father. It will then refresh our souls to withdraw for a while within the silence and solitude of the Holy House, and whilst we contemplate the scene with reverence let us endeavour to penetrate the Heart of Him who is praying there.

So beautiful is the picture presented to our minds by the thought of Jesus in prayer that truly it might suffice to rivet our inward eye and claim our adoring love, without the addition of any comment.

Let us regard Him as the Wisdom of the Father, the Eternal Son, kneeling there in silent contemplation of the Divine Majesty unveiled before Him, while He pours out the eternal love, the burning prayer which consumes His Sacred Heart. The labour of the day is over, and Jesus is now free to give Himself up unrestrainedly to that holy exercise which has not ceased to be the occupation of His Soul amidst His daily toil. How profound is the mystery of that Divine communication which passes between the Eternal Father and the Eternal Son, between the human Heart of the Man-God and the Father in whose bosom He had dwelt from all eternity. Unchecked now by the external trammels to which in His Incarnation He had made Himself subject, He could deliver Himself up to the transports of His love, and taste, in His earthly exile, His old, His eternal delight of solitude with God.

But we must not forget that we are contemplating our Divine Model in prayer; for we are not to suppose that we have chosen one too exalted for our imitation. No, Jesus prays as one of us. It is in Him a human Heart that throbs with love and desire, and He teaches us eloquently how to pray, and discloses qualities with which our prayer should be endowed. He has formally constituted Himself our Master in prayer, as in all other things. In His Public Life and in His Passion He has taught us even the very words in which we should present our petitions, or upon which they should be formed.

Now, it must be remembered the Heart of Jesus did not change; what it prompted His sacred lips to pronounce for our example afterwards, it contained within itself, and expressed in its secret communications with the Father during the Hidden Life at Nazareth. Therefore, we have only to penetrate His Heart in order to hear Him praying to our Father as well as His Father, teaching us thus to be unselfish in our prayer, and showing us that He carried all our necessities and interests in His Sacred Heart. We hear Him desiring the sanctification of the Father's Name, the advancement of His Kingdom, by which all peoples and nations may be brought to His knowledge and love; we find Him praying for the accomplishment of the Father's will by men on earth, even as it is accomplished in Heaven. We shall hear Him asking also for "our daily bread," teaching us thus from whom we are primarily to expect the sustenance necessary for our temporal support, but instructing us moreover how earnestly and daily we are to pray for that "super-substantial bread" without which we shall perish everlastingly.

There, too, we learn the humble petition for the forgiveness of our sins, and the condition by which we are to hope for that forgiveness - our own forgiveness, namely, of those who

may have wronged us. Finally, we hear the cry for deliverance from temptation and every evil that may result from sin offered up for others as for ourselves. Beautiful prayers of the Heart of Jesus! May you be ever in our hearts also, ever ascending from them, in union with His Heart, to the bosom of Him who is our Father likewise in Heaven.

Let us, when reciting the Pater noster, reflect that it is the expression of the prayer of the Sacred Heart during those long years of the Hidden Life, when our Lord was apparently doing nothing towards the accomplishment of His great work on earth. Surely such a reflection will help to animate us with His Spirit in reciting it, and thus render it far more efficacious in promoting His interests than we must fear it too frequently is.

In contemplating the Heart of Jesus when engaged in prayer, we must have remarked the order which He observes therein. The sanctification of His Father's Name, the coming of His Kingdom, the perfect accomplishment of His will, are the objects of the opening petitions. Then follows the begging of those benefits which we are to ask for our neighbour and for ourselves, thus practically elucidating the teaching He afterwards gave when He declared that the first commandment of the Law was the love of God above all things; and that the second was to love our neighbour as ourselves; as also when He commanded us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice. So will it be with us if charity is rightly ordered in our souls. The love of God, and consequently the thirst for His glory, will hold the supreme place in our hearts, from whence will flow spontaneously, as from its source, the love of our brethren and the quenchless desire for their salvation.

We have seen, too, the reverence with which Jesus prayed, a reverence which was at once tender and adoring, ready, and

full of ardour. Holy Scripture tells that "He was heard for His reverence," and makes known to us the fervour with which He prayed by telling of the "strong cry and tears" with which it was accompanied. His reverence was so deep, because He knew the Majesty of Him to whom He prayed, and the intensity of fervour with which He prayed resulted from the vehemence of His desire.

From our hearts also the "strong cry" will come forth which shall "pierce the clouds" when we shall be filled with the Spirit of the prayer of our Lord's Heart, and when we have learnt to love like Him, with the same kind of love, unselfish, self-forgetting, and full of desire for the things that He desired.

Finally, we too may participate in that delight in the holy exercise of prayer which we have witnessed in the Heart of Jesus. Love is its source - love which renders prayer not an isolated act distinct from the other duties of the day, but rather a more free, more unrestrained exercise of that which is ever going on within our hearts. He who loves God ardently, longs for the hour when, external occupations being over, he can give full scope to the effusions of his heart, alone with his Beloved.

For him the great duty of prayer has nothing irksome, even when deprived of sensible consolation. The companionship of God has for him no tediousness. Prayer is for him solitude with God, where he need have no reservations, where he need fear no criticism; he is alone with his Father, as he will be in the hour of death, as he will be throughout eternity. His soul will remain tranquilly at rest with God - his heart beating in union with the Heart of Jesus, and even in trial and in suffering, where this union exists there is peace.

And now, as the fruit of this meditation, let us ask ourselves the cause of our frequent aridity in prayer, an aridity perhaps which we have falsely attributed to some supernatural visitation, but which, we must in all sincerity acknowledge, proceeds from the want of union between our hearts and that of Jesus; the absence of an earnest, absorbing desire for all that regards His glory; an indifference to that fusion of interests which would render our hearts one with His, and make our prayer so fruitful an exercise for our own good and for the good of the Church and of society? We have the same objects to pray for now as Jesus had in the solitude of Nazareth. If therefore we do not find wherewith to occupy our minds and hearts in prayer, we can only attribute it to our little love, to our apathy for the advancement of God's glory. Let us go in spirit to Nazareth and entreat: Heart of Jesus, teach me to pray. Pater noster.

Meditation 8 - Sufferings of the Heart of Jesus During the Hidden Life in Relation to the Eternal Father, part 1

It is narrated that our Blessed Lord once revealed to Saint Bernard how grateful to His Heart would be a loving commemoration by us of the Wound which He suffered in His sacred shoulder from the pressure of the Cross, "this being," He said, "unrecorded, because unknown to men." May we not believe that the consideration of His interior sufferings during His Hidden Life will be equally pleasing to Him? - for surely they also are too little known or thought of. These inward sufferings, then, on which all true lovers of His Heart should delight to dwell, will form the subject of the present, and of several meditations which follow.

Let us consider, in the first place, His sufferings in relation to His Eternal Father. In order to estimate their intensity, we must remember that His knowledge of God - of the Divine perfections - of the homage due to each and all of them from men, and of the terrible outrage offered to them by sin, was infinite.

On the other hand, not a sin that ever has or will be committed escaped His clear vision. Now, if it were possible to sum up together all the sins that are committed throughout the world in a single day, hour, or even minute, and to present them every one to our view, the sight of that enormous mass of crime would be more than we could support for an instant; the full knowledge of all that it involved against the Divine Majesty would fill with horror even hearts in which Divine love burnt but faintly. What, then, must have been the anguish wherewith the accumulated crimes of every age deluged the Heart of Jesus

- each and all being offences against that Father for whose glory He was consumed with zeal! His knowledge therefore was the first source of His inward sufferings.

How inadequately we weigh the sorrows of His Heart if we confine our ideas of the lapse of time over which they extended to the short period of the Passion! His whole life was, in some degree, an agony - an inward passion by which He was repairing the Father's wrongs as efficaciously as when prostrate in Gethsemane, or hanging on the Cross.

What amount of concern do we feel for the outrages incessantly committed against God? Do we regard as an offence against the Divine Wisdom, the scorn, or the contempt of all authority with which the world abounds? Do we deplore the voluptuousness of our age as defiance offered to the Divine Beauty? Are our souls depressed at the sight of the general forgetfulness of God, at the knowledge of the terrible falls of which we hear from time to time, at the crimes whereby the creature casts away from him as worthless his Creator's eternal love? If our hearts were not filled with trifles light as air and passing with the hour, if they were less occupied with self - then the Heart of Jesus would shed its light into them, and enable us to see more clearly the wrongs of God, and to mourn more deeply over them.

The Heart of Jesus had not only to endure the sight of all the sins committed against His Father, but to feel as though they had been done by Himself. He had undertaken the office of atonement, and He must support the whole of its awful burden. "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee have fallen upon Me," and "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." He was as the "emissary goat" bearing the sins of the whole world, and doing penance for them in the

desert of Nazareth by the secret anguish which flooded His Heart.

We are prone to regard His Hidden Life as one of unruffled sweetness, interiorly at least. But what a different aspect it assumes when we penetrate into His Heart and behold the waves of sorrow with which it was inundated during those long silent years of inward crucifixion - of interior reparation of His Father's outraged glory.

What suffering is there so keen, so bitter as that caused by the sense of sinfulness, of our own unlikeness to God, and, if we must needs be tried so far, of our rejection by the Supreme object of our love? And yet the Heart of Jesus has drunk this chalice, long years before we hear Him asking in Gethsemane that it might pass from Him. Thus is He at Nazareth our model of interior reparation by inward suffering, just as in the Passion He presents to us the exterior reparation which the honour of His Father claimed.

Let us not be surprised, after giving ourselves up in a special manner to the service of God and His Church, after our view of His wrongs has grown clearer in the light of love, and our desire of repairing them become more ardent, if we are permitted to suffer in an increased degree, if we are required to pass through interior trials of every kind, and especially if we are overwhelmed with a sense of sinfulness sufficient to crush us beneath its weight. If we support this patiently and lovingly, in union with the Heart of Jesus, it will form our interior reparation, through our inward suffering, for the outrages committed daily, hourly, ceaselessly against God. Jesus of Nazareth will be at once our model and our strength. Let us then habituate ourselves to think often, to think deeply of the sufferings of His Sacred Heart during His Hidden Life.

Meditation 9 - Sufferings of the Heart of Jesus During the Hidden Life in Relation to the Eternal Father, part 2

We have already considered the sufferings of the Heart of Jesus as proceeding from the Divine light which flooded His Sacred Soul, and by which He beheld with such terrible distinctness the outrages committed against His Father, and the love and homage of which He was defrauded. We have now to consider them as the consequence of that burning love for the Father with which He was consumed.

In proportion to the intensity of His love was the magnitude of His sorrow for His Father's wrongs. The application of this truth to human love amply confirms the fact. But in respect of the love at once human and Divine which filled the Sacred Heart, its truth was evidenced in a degree to us wholly unknown.

Love necessarily engenders suffering. It renders the heart sensitive, even when otherwise it would not have been so; it causes every outrage offered to the beloved object to rebound like an arrow piercing our own hearts to the core. Thus the Heart of Jesus, the most sensitive Heart that ever throbbed, that Heart in which the love of the Father was the all-absorbing, all-prevailing element, beheld with keenest anguish, not only the gross crimes which even ordinary Christians regard with horror, but also those countless infidelities which we esteem so lightly, graces coldly rejected, high vocations slighted and utterly abandoned, indifference to the tribulations of the Church, and to the increase or decrease of the Kingdom of God on earth; it saw them all and was pressed down with the weight of sorrow which lay on it, day and night, in the solitude of Nazareth.

The weakness of our love is undoubtedly the secret of our little concern for the outrages we unceasingly hear of, as being committed against God. If the fire of Divine love has not purified our hearts from their natural selfishness, they will not be sensitive about God's glory, they will not be touched by the knowledge of His wrongs. Our soul's eye will not be quick to see where His honour is involved, unless love has rendered its vision clear and delicate. If, on the contrary, our hearts beat in union with the Heart of Jesus and have become imbued with His Spirit, then whatever touches the Divine glory will interest us; or rather, that glory will be as dear to us as "the apple of our eye." And hence it comes that, as He is everywhere and in every way dishonoured by men, poignant sorrow must inevitably spring from our love; and thus silently, wherever we may be, or of whatever nature may be our occupation, we shall be offering to the Divine Majesty the inward reparation of our sorrowing love, in union with that which the Heart of Jesus offered during the long years of His Hidden Life.

The sorrow of the Heart of Jesus at the sight of the rebellions against His Father was fruitful in results, conveying an important lesson to ourselves. It not unfrequently happens that pious persons, when they hear of offences committed against God, content themselves with the sentiment of sorrow, with perhaps some verbal expression of horror, barren of all practical reparation. Thus innumerable opportunities are unheeded in which they might have tendered to the Divine Majesty an acceptable tribute of loving atonement, had the transient sorrow they felt left beneficial results in their souls.

Far different was it with the Heart of Jesus of Nazareth. His great sorrow, the offspring of His burning love, induced an insatiable thirst for reparation, answering, as it were, to the "preparation of heart," mentioned by the Psalmist, which the

omniscient eye of God perceives so readily and accepts so willingly. It is in itself a sublime act of reparative love, a silent homage of sorrowful desire, forming a hymn of praise to an offended God breathed forth from within the secret recesses of the soul.

Let us examine our own hearts, and discover whether any such generous desire springs up within us when we hear instances of the scornful rejection of God's love, and of the insults and wrongs incessantly offered to Him. Let us beg our Lord to impart to us also a spark of His own burning love for the Eternal Father, so as to render us sensitive to His wrongs, and enkindle within us a practical and permanent desire of repairing them to the utmost of our power.

Meditation 10 - Sufferings of the Heart of Jesus During The Hidden Life in Consequence of Its Love of Souls

In the preceding meditations we have regarded the sufferings of the Heart of Jesus in His Hidden Life as resulting from His love of the Father and His sorrow on account of the wrongs done to Him. We there considered Him in His character of the Divine Atoner. We are now about to regard Him as suffering His inward passion in His character of Saviour of men.

The love of souls was for His Sacred Heart by no means a less inexhaustible source of sorrow than was His love of the Father from which it emanated. Here again we must remember how the infiniteness of His knowledge was, as it were, the fountain-head of His sorrow, from whence it flowed in pitiless waves into His Sacred Heart. He saw every sin that every soul ever had committed, or should commit until the end of time. He beheld them in all their malice, in all their foulness, in all their heartlessness, in all their terrible consequences for time and for eternity. The thought of them was ever present to His mind; the anguish which they caused Him was ever lying on His Heart. He knew them, not in general, as we know them, but each detail was revealed to Him, and aggravated His sufferings. As He silently toiled in the House of Nazareth, His gaze traveled far beyond the horizon that bounded His outward view, and laid bare before Him all the crimes even at that moment being committed, and the countless souls rushing on to the abyss. He saw the hearts for which He thirsted growing cold and estranged from Him, and consequently forfeiting the special graces He had destined for them - the beautiful thrones He had already purchased by His toil and His sweat and His tears. He saw

His own eternal love placed in the balance with that of some pitiful creature, nay, even the latter preferred and Himself rejected. How truly applicable then are the words of David to the Heart of Jesus when suffering in the solitude of Nazareth as Saviour of men: "My sorrow is always before Me."

And while our thoughts are engrossed by the most puerile interests, if not by something worse, how many of our fellow-men are rushing on to the precipice which must be their eternal ruin. Oh! how different our lives would be, how much more real, more earnest, more devoted and self-sacrificing, if the sources of the sorrow of the Sacred Heart were more familiar to us, if the thought recurred to us, not once in a way, but habitually: At this moment souls are rejecting the last grace, a step which will lead to their eternal reprobation; while others are on the verge of committing the last sin destined to fill up the measure of their iniquity and bind them down to be the slaves of Satan for ever. At this moment Heaven, salvation itself, all are being forfeited eternally, and I might perhaps co-operate in averting this eternal evil, this endless misery, by an earnest appeal to the Heart of Jesus, by a fervent aspiration, by some slight sacrifice made with a wholly unselfish view to the saving of souls.

If the clear light in which Jesus beheld the loss of souls, with all the sins that conducted to that loss, was a source of inexpressible anguish to His Sacred Heart, what shall be said of His burning love? His sorrows, as the Saviour of men, were in proportion to His boundless love for them. Although His love of souls was an integral part of His love of the Eternal Father, nevertheless, from one point of view the two kinds of love were antagonistic, and it was this antagonism which made His Heart a prey to such cruel agonies on our account.

There is one terrible thought, and yet we must not shrink from it, if we would form anything approaching to an adequate estimate of the secret sufferings of the Sacred Heart. It is the thought of that point where Mercy and Love must yield at last to Justice - when, grace after grace having been rejected, the final one is cast back contemptuously in the face of the Divine Giver, and the grand but awful privilege of free-will uses its liberty, but for the ruin of the soul, in choosing Satan before God. Even the soul that thus recklessly makes this terrible choice affecting its eternity, is the object of the burning love of the Heart of Jesus. He has striven for it in prayer, He has wept over it while He toiled at Nazareth, as afterwards He would weep over Jerusalem because it was determined to reject Him, and so pronounced the decree of its own destruction.

We may picture to ourselves, if we will, and if we venture it, the dearest object of our own heart's love precipitating itself into Hell, and so casting itself away from us for ever; but it is only faintly, even then, that we can conjecture the agony of the Heart of Jesus at the vision always lying before Him. No human love can be compared to that with which the Sacred Heart loved each one of those myriads of souls whom it beheld rushing on to the abyss of eternal misery, and for whom His love, His sufferings, and His bitter death, would all prove alike in vain.

And yet He was compelled to consent to their loss, in consequence of their obstinate rejection of the plentiful redemption He had come to bring them. He had "despised all His substance as nothing," in order to gain them. He had left His beautiful Paradise, and come down to live as an exile on this cheerless earth, and to suffer and toil as one of themselves that He might win them. He had thrown away His Heart upon them, and the very intensity of His love was consuming away His life. And yet He must consent to their

final reprobation because they will rush on to their ruin in spite of Him - will break away from His arms though outstretched to save them. The Divine Justice exacted from Him that awful submission in all its terrible completeness and unreservedness - "If this chalice may not pass away, but I must drink it, Thy will be done, - this chalice, the dregs of which are the loss of souls whom I left Thy bosom but to save."

It not unfrequently occurs that the agony of the Sacred Heart is referred by us in our meditations exclusively, or very nearly so, to our Lord's anticipation of His own Passion and Death. We shall, however, form a defective estimate of the sufferings of His Hidden Life, if we lose sight of the inward struggle ever going on within His Heart between His love for souls and His love for His Heavenly Father. After the rejection of His mercy and love God claimed that justice should be done to His Sovereign Majesty, and Jesus must bow down beneath that most equitable exaction. It will help us to pray, and moreover to understand the sorrow of our Saviour's Heart, if we often think of Him as enduring this inward agony in the solitude of Nazareth. During the stillness of night, when Mary and Joseph were reposing, and no human eye beheld Him, may we not as legitimately picture the world's Saviour prostrate there in secret agony, as when afterwards we behold Him bending to the ground, beneath the olive trees on the night of His Passion? If we could penetrate to its fathomless depths the interior of His Sacred Heart, we should see that for Him Nazareth was a prolonged Gethsemane.

Our Divine Lord has taught us that the salvation of souls implies suffering. Therefore, if we would co-operate with Him in His Mission of love on earth, we must of necessity suffer, for the apostleship of prayer and suffering are inseparable, and in proportion to our love of souls will be our suffering for

their sake. Let us ask the Heart of Jesus to communicate to us its burning love of souls, that so our supplications and our sacrifices in their behalf may become unceasing, and the thought of their salvation the spring of all our actions. If an apostolic love burns within our breasts, we shall never want occupation wherever we may be, neither will selfish interests possess all our attention or narrow our hearts. Those hearts, on the contrary, will embrace the whole world in their love, and thus we shall grow into the likeness of the Heart of Jesus, from the very vehemence of our desire to become saviours in union with Him. As we can do nothing of ourselves, let us earnestly ask the Sacred Heart to make us understand how much its love for us caused it to suffer, and how generous we also must be in suffering, if we would co-operate with it in the salvation of souls.

Meditation 11 - The Zeal and Desire of the Heart of Jesus of Nazareth, Another Source of Its Sufferings

The burning zeal which secretly consumed Him, the ardent desire which, as a compressed fire, burnt within His Soul, are the next sources of sorrow in the Sacred Heart of the Divine Solitary which we must consider.

"The zeal of Thy house hath eaten Me up" had been foretold of Him ages before, and with His own sacred lips He had said, in alluding to the Passion by which He was to redeem the world: "I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" The latter words reveal to us the long interior penance endured by Him until the time at length arrived, when He might give vent, as it were, to the zeal of His Heart by delivering Himself up to the outward sufferings for which He thirsted. It may be asked. Why did He not shorten the time and accomplish at once the work He so ardently anticipated? The answer is that, had He done so, we should have lost the example of the beautiful virtues which His Hidden Life affords us. He would, moreover, have shrunk from one of the most painful trials of His existence on this earth. For surely we may call it the most painful, at least from the point of view in which we are now considering it. This the generosity of His love forbade. Lastly - His "time was not yet come," and He, who came to render homage to the Sovereign Wisdom of God, would fulfill with a perfect obedience the Eternal Decrees.

He had made Himself subject to all the states, all the exigencies of the human nature which He had assumed; and consequently, despite the burning ardour of His desires, the active energy of the zeal which stirred His Sacred Heart, He

remained there in Nazareth, pursuing, day after day, the humble labours incident to the state of life which He had chosen.

The intensity of His interior suffering at this period can only be measured by the fervour of His zeal, and by the clear knowledge which He possessed of the condition of the world at that time. He saw the multitudes even then, "distressed, and lying like sheep that have no shepherd," and He longed to conduct them into the pastures of eternal life - to the fountains of living water which they would find in His own Sacred Heart. He saw how great was the harvest of souls to be garnered, and He longed to go forth and to gather the sheaves into His Father's house. He beheld the doctors of the Law teaching the people, "the blind leading the blind," and how did He not desire to go and speak to them Himself of that Father who so loved them that He had given Him, His only-begotten Son, to redeem them. How did not His Heart burn within Him to go and tell them of the Kingdom that was so near them, to preach to them the words, to perform the works, for which His Father sent Him. He saw and knew and felt all this, and His Heart was consumed within Him with the ardour of His zeal, which seemed to increase in intensity by the very reason of its compression.

Thus we may believe that the sufferings of the Heart of Jesus were, if possible, more intense during the years of His Hidden Life than even during His Passion, since, in addition to the knowledge which formed the primary source of His sorrow, there was here the inability (in consequence of the restraint He had voluntarily placed upon Himself) to manifest His zeal in the way His human Heart would have prompted.

The love of God produces the same effects in kind within the hearts of His faithful ones, as in that of His Divine Son. Love

is the source of zeal for the Divine glory, and in proportion to the strength of that zeal and of that love will be the capacity for suffering. What is the first impulse of the human heart when it knows that some one whom it loves, and whose sorrows it might relieve, is suffering; when it is aware of some good to be effected or of some danger to be avoided, in behalf of the object beloved? Does it not feel impelled to fly at once and place all its energies at the service of its friend? And does it not suffer torture when withheld from hastening to his assistance? Of the same nature is that sentiment which the love of God and zeal for His glory inspires in generous, ardent hearts - a sentiment which, under some circumstances, becomes to them a source of keenest suffering, even as it was to the Heart of Jesus during His Hidden Life. He has carried our griefs," and so this form of inward suffering amongst the rest, and therefore it is in the school of His Sacred Heart that we shall learn to sanctify it. If we are faithful disciples of the Divine Solitary, there will be no restless pining for works external to our vocation, no chafing under pressure of obedience which restrains our zeal; but our love and our ardour will find expression in fervent prayer and in the patient endurance of that inward pain which exterior circumstances have caused.

As zeal, springing from the love of God, is one of the most generous sentiments of the human heart, and most conducive to the attainment of the highest sanctity, so, on the other hand, is it all-important to watch lest the enemy of souls perverts this instrument of good into a subtle poison by tempting us to restlessness of mind, to the formation of chimerical projects, to the desire of performing works foreign to our state and beyond our capacity, and finally perhaps, if we are in Religion, to formal disobedience and ultimate loss of vocation. For a protection against so deceptive a snare, let us consider the Divine Labourer in the workshop of Nazareth. What heart was ever consumed with zeal equal to

His? Who can dare to complain of the ordinances of God's providence, and of the restraints of obedience, if he has the example of Jesus of Nazareth before his eyes?

Those long hidden years then, during which the manifestation of our Lord's zeal was restrained within His Sacred Heart, were they unavailable for the Mission He had come to fulfill? Very far from this. The desires which consumed Him were, from their very vehemence, a secret agony, amidst which arose to the Father's bosom burning prayers and supplications, gathering force from the anguish of love and desire which prompted them, and gaining intensity from the very fact that they were the only outlet for the pent-up zeal which devoured Him.

In the stillness of those prayers, during which we contemplate the Divine Victim panting, even whilst yet at Nazareth, for the hour when He might go forth "as a giant to run in the way" destined for Him, and might consummate the final sacrifice, we seem to hear Him, in the all-holy impatience of His Sacred Heart, sighing out His complaint into His Father's ear - a complaint which was in itself a prayer of utmost power - "I thirst," for the baptism of blood, "and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." "My life is consumed with grief, and My years in sighs.... My tears have become My food day and night, for they who violate the law have become mighty - they go on from crime to crime."

What a model this for souls in whom the love of God has been enkindled, and who ardently desire to labour for His glory. Those amongst them who, by their position, state of life, or circumstances, are unable to satisfy their zeal in the performance of exterior works, either of penance or of charity, will find in prayer, in suffering, in secret self-immolation, an efficacious channel for determining the

direction of all their energies. They will suffer, since suffering forms an all-important part in their apostleship, but Jesus of Nazareth will teach them how available their secret sufferings will be for the interests they have at heart. Those hearts, beating in union with the Heart of Jesus, will pour forth unceasing prayer for the objects of their zeal; their very sufferings rendering that prayer more fervent and persuasive. Seeing how impossible it is for them to make God known and loved by their active, or rather visible co-operation, they seize upon every opportunity of humiliation or mortification, in a word, upon every species of suffering which may be acceptable to God as a work of impetration. They endeavour, moreover, so to sanctify their lives that all their actions may conduce more effectively to the interests of God, for which cause they desire to spend themselves, and for which they would gladly die.

Souls such as these practise virtue from the purest, highest motive, and although, as so many saints have desired, they would fain, if it were possible, multiply themselves in order to be able to go into all parts of the world to labour for God, and to make Him known, yet, in their inability to do this, they retrace within themselves the Hidden Life of Nazareth and thus consume their lives by a secret martyrdom of burning love - of insatiable zeal. They will become living victims, unknown to the world indeed, but very dear to the Sacred Heart; and their sighs and tears and ardent prayers will be as effectual in hastening the triumph of God and of His Church, and the salvation of souls, as the most brilliant works wrought by those whose state of life permits them to exercise their zeal in a visible apostleship.

Let us ask Jesus of Nazareth to give us an earnest, devoted, and well-ordered zeal, and courage at the same time to support the interior sufferings that may result from it.

Meditation 12 - Loneliness of the Heart of Jesus in the Hidden Life

In meditating on the sufferings of the Heart of Jesus, we must not omit to mention one, the memory of which may afford the utmost consolation to ourselves under many circumstances in which we may be placed. We refer to His loneliness of Heart, a special and necessary characteristic indeed of His sojourn on earth from year to year, but calculated to impress us more forcibly during His Hidden Life, on account of the monotonous course of exterior events, and the absence, at the same time, of aught that could provide an outlet for the sorrows of His Heart.

It is not material solitude that is alluded to in this meditation; neither do we refer precisely to lack of sympathy, since, as we have seen in a previous meditation, our Lord's intimate intercourse with the spotless soul of His Blessed Mother, whose heart beat in such close union with His own, was one of the especial joys of His Humanity. What is here so particularly referred to is that loneliness of Heart which was for Him inevitable, considering that none but He united in Himself two Natures, and hence not even the sinless soul of the Immaculate Virgin could penetrate into the depths of His Soul or fathom His marvelous woes.

Recall what we have meditated on His knowledge, which formed so fertile a source of suffering to His Sacred Heart, and add thereto the memory of the infinite love and the various forms of love that met together in that Heart, and were, in some sort, antagonistic to each other, and surely we shall be able to comprehend how, of necessity, He was indeed "alone in His sorrows" upon earth.

One of the innumerable forms which self-love sometimes assumes is to make souls imagine themselves misunderstood. They believe that they are possessed of some speciality which is not to be fathomed, just as hypochondriacs imagine themselves the victim of some unknown disease, and cling to the creations of their imagination with obstinate tenacity.

There are, however, other souls who, in reality, participate, to a certain extent, in the loneliness of the Heart of Jesus; souls whom God has endowed with choice gifts, with vast capacity for suffering, and with high and holy aspirations, and whom His providence has placed in uncongenial circumstances - amongst those, perhaps, who could in no way share their aspirations, or even appreciate or understand them. They may be surrounded by loving hearts, by hearts which would sympathize with them if they were capable of doing so, but this is not enough. The soul with its most intimate sentiments and desires, the intellect with its vast range of thought, the heart with its inexpressible yearnings, its secret agonies, are alone.

Let such souls go in spirit to the House of Nazareth, and rest their hearts, oppressed by their sense of isolation, upon the most lonely Heart that ever throbbed on earth, the only Heart that will fully understand their grief, and therefore the only one capable of consoling them.

What, then, may we not learn from meditation on the loneliness of the Heart of Jesus in its sorrows? We shall learn to esteem our own interior isolation, however real it may be, as one we have no right to complain of when we remember that of the Divine Exile. Instead of yielding to a morbid depression, when our aspirations, our sorrows, and our secret yearnings are little understood by those around us, we shall, in our loneliness, cling more closely to God, who

knows all the weight of anguish at our heart, and the hidden sources from whence it springs. We shall learn to rest on God, and thus become more and more detached from human consolation, in proportion as He makes us feel we are not alone, even when the sense of loneliness is pressing upon us most. "I am not alone, because the Father is with Me," said Jesus amidst His sufferings, and yet what heart was ever so truly alone in the magnitude and profoundness of its sorrows? This rest in God amidst the loneliness of the soul, is an act of highest homage, for it is an acknowledgment that He is all-sufficient for us. It is meritorious, because in order to persevere in it aright severe self-discipline is necessary for curbing the movements of nature; and one of its chief merits consists in its being life-long, thus necessitating almost heroic patience in order to maintain it to the end. Let us ask the Divine Solitary of Nazareth to give us the grace of finding God to be sufficient for us in all our sufferings, when it pleases Him to withdraw from us every human sympathy.

Meditation 13 - Humiliations of the Heart of Jesus in His Hidden Life

Humiliation may not appear at first sight to form so striking a feature in the Hidden Life of our Lord as it does in the Passion, on account of the exterior peace and tranquility which that life presents, of the absence of those exterior outrages which were afterwards to be committed against Him, and from the fact that the life at Nazareth was passed in the intimate companionship of the two most holy beings upon earth, who not only loved Him with all the ardour of their souls, but moreover revered Him and adored Him as their God.

Nevertheless, when we remember on the one hand who He was, and on the other the condition to which He had reduced Himself, the nature of His occupations, and various other circumstances incidental to it, and add to all these its long continuance, we shall surely feel ourselves penetrated with the thought of the profound depths of humiliation to which the Heart of Jesus was subjected, during that phase of His mortal life.

"He was subject." Behold in these words the entire revelation of His self-abasement. He came to repair the outrage which our pride had offered to His Father, to merit our pardon, and to mark out for us the way by which alone we can enter into eternal life. Therefore He began, whilst yet at Nazareth, "to do and to teach" by His wonderful example. If we will but contemplate at leisure the mystery of that Hidden Life, we may perhaps learn to appreciate more clearly the wound which pride had inflicted on humanity, and to conceive a higher esteem for, and more sincere desire

of imitating, the Word Incarnate in our practice of that humility which He has shown us to be our only remedy.

We behold Him - the Wisdom of the Father - submitting to instruction as though He had need of teaching, even in the simplest things: for example, the work of forming rough household furniture or implements of agriculture. It was the external occupation of Him, whose mind had conceived from eternity the design of the universe, and whose hand had created all things; of Him concerning whom it is asked in Scripture, "Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counsellor? He that sends forth light and it goes, and hath called it and it obeys Him with trembling, before whom the nations are as nothing, and the islands as a little dust."

We see Him again as He meekly received the small, and perhaps grudgingly bestowed, remuneration for His and His foster-father's painful toil, accompanied often, no doubt, by the bluntly expressed complaints of those for whom He worked. This formed a true foreshadowing of the treatment He should receive until the end of time from His creatures, who would act with niggardliness towards Him, though He laboured so much and painfully for them, and who, esteeming their own puny understanding above His Eternal Wisdom, would complain of and resist His will whenever it crossed their own.

Let us, as we fix our attention on this picture in the House of Nazareth, compare our own conduct with that of the humble Jesus, and examine to what extent we imitate Him in the great example of self-humiliation which He affords us. Has not the spirit of the world more influence upon us than that of our Blessed Lord, and does it not prompt us to be ever striving to appear something more, something greater, more important, than we really are? Is it not our insatiable

ambition to seem to be possessed of more knowledge, more learning, higher birth, in a word, more advantages every way than we have, and is not the least slight, the least unfavourable opinion or preference of another sufficient to fill our hearts with jealousy, and with all the most ignoble feelings of corrupt nature? Is not the love of notice a passion within us, almost unconsciously to ourselves insinuating itself into all we do or say? There are men to whom a painful notoriety would be preferable to obscurity, oblivion, or apparent insignificance; and there are many pious persons who pretend to much devotion for the humiliations of the Passion, but who find but little wherewith to occupy themselves in the more interior humiliations of the Hidden Life, and who can scarcely even appreciate them.

Humility is the hardest lesson which the Christian has to learn, and humiliation and subjection, from which alone it can be learnt, are the most painful trials for human nature to support. It was in consequence of this that Jesus chose to submit for such long years to the subjection incidental to a common life. Had He gone away into the desert, and practised there the most frightful austerities. it could not have been said of Him that "He was subject," in the strict and literal sense that it can be said of Him now. Isolated acts of self-humiliation, even though constantly repeated, would not have afforded us the same example of habitual subjection. It is, above all, His state of humiliation in His Hidden Life, and its long continuance, which should form the subject of our special meditation. It is this which affords us so perfect a model of reparation to the Divine Majesty for our pride, and so striking a lesson as to the most efficacious manner of counteracting that mortal enemy of our souls.

The same species of sin which cast down the rebel angels from Heaven, which lost to our first parents their earthly Paradise, is now hurrying countless souls into the abyss;

hence more than ever, the importance of studying profoundly the Hidden Life of Him who, being God, made Himself subject to His creatures in order to atone for our rebellious pride. He knew that His Father's glory would be better promoted by a life of subjection and self-abasement than by the most brilliant works He could perform; wherefore, resolving in His Heart, what afterwards He would pronounce openly, "I seek not My own glory," He was content to remain in that humble state through the long years we see Him dwelling at Nazareth, until the time had arrived which was decreed for His entering on His public ministry.

If the hearts of men were penetrated with the spirit of the Heart of Jesus, how different would be the lives of the greater number, and how changed the conduct even of those who are striving after virtue. Looking on the self-humiliation of the Incarnate God, we should become ashamed of our pride, we should conceive a contempt for our own littleness, from whence spring up our petty ambitions, our self-complacency in either real or imaginary advantages, our secret craving for notice, esteem, honour of any kind. Then would those whom reverse of fortune has removed from the sphere they formerly occupied, and placed in new and humiliating circumstances, find their consolation in the thought that Jesus, the Son of the living God, was known in the village of Nazareth but as the "Son of the Carpenter." Then would the Religious of high birth, or who had held a good social position, or had been heretofore esteemed for his intellectual endowments, rejoice if he were destined to pass his entire religious life in insignificant employments, unnoticed, passed by, depreciated, in a word, the lowest in the house of God. He would rejoice, moreover, in being: subject to those to whom, if he had followed the suggestions of the spirit of pride - of the world - and of nature, it would have been impossible for him to submit.

From what would come this transformation? It would come from the fact that he had learnt to see in the humiliations presented to him a means of growing more like to Jesus of Nazareth, whose Hidden Life had been made familiar to him through prayer, and also a means of subduing the greatest enemy of mankind, the most formidable obstacle to the world's salvation, namely, pride.

Let us then ask the Heart of Jesus to grant us a great esteem for the virtue of humility, and great generosity in carrying out every practice necessary for its acquisition. Above all, let us co-operate with His grace, in order to obtain submission of heart and mind, that we may live in a constant spirit of subjection, uniting our intention with that of Jesus in His Hidden Life.

Meditation 14 - Perseverance and Long-Suffering of the Heart of Jesus and the Interior Trials of His Hidden Life

There is nothing more crucifying to nature in our fulfillment of the duties of the spiritual life than perseverance amidst the trials which are incidental to it. Of this long-suffering, our Lord affords us an admirable example in His life at Nazareth.

In His infinite love for us, He would first bear in His own Heart the sufferings through which we should have to pass in striving after the attainment of sanctity. Hence, as Holy Writ warns us, we are not to think of Him as One who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but rather as One who, above all others, is able to have compassion, "because He Himself also was compassed with infirmity. (Hebrews 5:2) That is to say, although no rebellion could actually enter into His most Holy Soul, because in it was found no concupiscence; nevertheless, through the excess of His love for us, He would experience suffering similar to that we have to endure in the trials and combats to which our souls are exposed.

It was not alone in Gethsemane that our Lord passed through the struggle of an inward agony. The long years of His Hidden Life, could we penetrate the veil, would but disclose much the same experience. We should not, indeed, behold Him prostrate beneath the olive-trees, and bathed in a sweat of blood. We should see Him, on the contrary, occupied in His accustomed toil, His countenance expressive of that tranquillity which ever reigned in His Heart, however

great might be the sufferings that were rending it. But in reality the chalice was no less present to Him at Nazareth, and the answer, *Fiat voluntas tua*, proceeded from a Heart that felt its burden even then. He was bearing within Himself the experience of suffering and struggling humanity, in order that none might hereafter say, He had laid on them a burden of which He had not Himself borne the weight; and in these long weary inward sufferings He was likewise meriting for us the grace to resist temptation faithfully, and to endure patiently to the end.

There are trials peculiar to every state. Those of the Heart of Jesus in His Hidden Life are remarkably useful for souls tried by temptation, inasmuch as it is the duration of suffering, and the absence of change in its form, which constitute for human nature its sharpest crucifixion. Now these two features are the prominent characteristics of our Lord's Life at Nazareth. Year by year followed the round of the same state of abjection, the same monotonous labour, the same privations, the same sorrows ever pressing on His Heart, the same restraint upon that zeal which was consuming Him, together with all the numberless trials to be expected in the Human Nature He had assumed, and in the lowly state which He had chosen. Nevertheless, in the midst of all. His Soul was tranquil and unchanging in its purpose of enduring to the end, of persevering in that life of inward crucifixion, of annihilation, and of trial, until the same will which bade Him continue to support it, should decree for Him another sphere of action.

Let us gather fruit for ourselves from the ineffable consolation of these words: "He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows." In our struggles between good and evil, in our temptations, in our restless impatience beneath protracted trials, - long seasons of aridity, of apparent uselessness, of humiliation - in a word, the continued

succession of miseries to which we are liable, let us animate ourselves with the thought that the Heart of Jesus has borne this trial first, has tasted its bitterness, has measured its weight, and has, in suffering it, merited for us the grace to support it faithfully, as long as He wills it should remain with us. Let us turn our eyes towards Jesus of Nazareth, patient, long-suffering, tried indeed in the sensitive part of His Soul, that He might share our miseries, and by His own experience have compassion on our infirmities, but yet ever presenting to us the example of His Sacred Heart, contented to suffer, without the shadow of a desire to shorten, by one moment, the duration of its pain.

Let us not picture to ourselves our Blessed Lord as One insensible to the painful burdens He had to support. Not to speak of numerous instances in His Public Life, the words that fell from His sacred lips in Gethsemane and on Calvary reveal the contrary. True indeed it is, that between His two Natures there could be no struggle, no strife; nevertheless, within the sensitive part of His Soul, He suffered in such a manner as to render Him no stranger to pangs, akin to those which souls endure amidst the struggles of temptation. Were we to suppose it otherwise, we should deprive ourselves of a most fertile source of consolation in the midst of the sharpest and bitterest sufferings of our interior life, and should lose our greatest support in enduring them.

There is another consideration full of utility, as well as consolation, for apostolic souls, with reference to the continued duration of the inward sufferings of our Lord, in His Hidden Life. It is that by these sufferings He merited grace for the tempted. Hence, we may not only draw comfort for ourselves, in contemplating the interior agonies which our Lord condescended to endure for our sakes, but we may also learn from the manner in which He endured them, to be faithful when under temptation, for the sake of others also.

We may and ought to endure in an apostolic spirit, temptation, as well as every other form of suffering. Let us then ask our Lord to accept, as a prayer for those who are under strong temptation, the anguish we must suffer in the endurance of our own temptations, and in that resistance and struggle which fidelity necessitates. Were we animated with this spirit, we should have courage to crush the human spirit rising within us, and tempting us to sins of pride, of anger, and of impatience, and to every other movement that rebels against the Spirit of God.

They who suffer thus will merit to see one day the fruit of their fidelity, the reward of that generosity wherewith "their soul hath laboured," as Sacred Writ expresses it, and this fruit will be the "long lived seed" of souls whom they have helped to save by their patient and persevering endurance under their own trials. (Isaias 53:10,11) Let us ask the Heart of Jesus of Nazareth to give us the grace of fidelity and longanimity in the midst of our interior trials and temptations.

Meditation 15 - Obedience of the Heart of Jesus, in the Hidden Life

It is written of our Blessed Lord that "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (Hebrews 5:8) By these words we are not to understand that any new knowledge really dawned upon Him, as the sufferings incidental to the weak nature assumed by Him were prolonged, but rather that, in the weakness of our flesh as Man, He continued to experience daily more and more that which, as God, He had ever known - the difficulty which human nature feels in the practice of supernatural obedience. The disobedience of the first Adam was to be repaired by the obedience of the second, and this obedience He began to practise from the first moment of His Incarnation.

As with the other virtues of our Blessed Lord, so is it with His obedience. We are too prone to limit our meditation upon them almost exclusively to the time of His Passion, forgetting the fact that thirty-three years had been spent in the heroic exercise of those virtues which were given for our example, and which, it is true, seemed to reach their climax in the Passion.

Again, in the scanty and superficial meditations which are ordinarily made on the Hidden Life of our Lord, it is generally His exterior obedience upon which the attention is riveted, without any reference to the interior spirit of obedience, whence every outward act emanated. Now it is the interior obedience which we particularly wish to consider at present, inasmuch as this will show us in what consist the essential excellence and efficacy of obedience, and what are the means afforded by it for healing the wounds which pride has inflicted on our soul.

It must be remembered that Jesus saw habitually before His mental eye the terrible revolt of Adam, and all the dismal consequences to the human race of that first revolt. He understood the sin of disobedience in all its varieties, lasting until the end of time - disobedience of the intellect, and of the will; disobedience against the commands which God with His own voice had spoken; revolt against the authority of His Church and of lawful superiors; disobedience of children towards their parents - in a word, the general insurrection of human nature against all authority which has God for its first principle. In addition to disobedience in itself, our Lord foreknew the weakening of faith, which, as ages swept on, would prevent men from recognizing the Divine source, whence all legitimate authority emanated, the blindness too of intellect which would ensue, and would cause them to lose sight of the motive and the object of the obedience required of them, and to attach undue importance to the material part of it - that is, to the nature of the acts it enjoins.

In order to remedy this error, our Lord would pass nearly the whole of His mortal life in the performance of the most lowly acts of obedience, whereby we might learn that there are no actions, however insignificant in themselves, which may not become, in the highest degree, full of efficacy when they spring from a motive of supernatural obedience. The daily external actions of Jesus of Nazareth were common to Him and to the lowliest children of men; nevertheless, there was not one which did not yield infinite merit in the sight of the Eternal Father. In each of them He designed to repair that Father's glory, outraged by the rebellion of His creatures. "He was subject." He who from eternity knew all things, became a scholar of Joseph the carpenter, and would not have swerved a line from his instructions regarding his lowly trade, or aught else wherein he exercised his authority as head of the Holy Family. He obeyed the instructions,

moreover, of the ignorant Nazarenes, for whom His foster-father worked, and submitted His will in order to carry out their often stupid directions or grossly conceived designs. He regarded not the matter of His obedience. His one work was ever before His mind - to obey every person who should command Him, and to do so in whatsoever they commanded Him.

It was in the long-continued exercise of obedience such as this, and in the habitual restraint which it demanded of Him as Man, that "He learned," by suffering, the arduous labour which awaits those who devote themselves to a life of obedience. As on all other points, so on this, He experienced first in Himself what He would afterwards require from others.' But we lose the assistance we might otherwise draw from the obedience of His long hidden years in the House of Nazareth on account of the superficial way in which, as we have said, the Hidden Life is ordinarily meditated by us, hence the marvelous obedience of our Lord makes little impression upon us, until we are forced into the recognition of it in the more startling scenes of the Passion.

There is a certain excitability in human nature which causes it to find great trials, especially if they are of short duration, much easier to bear than, lesser ones, and there are souls who could win a hero's fame amidst open injuries, calumnies, and the like, and yet would be unable to endure the gentle, inward crucifixion of a life of unreserved obedience, which involves the captivity of their will and judgment. Persons such as these will read with amazement the obedience of our Blessed Lord towards His wicked judges and persecutors in His Passion, yet will find but little to fix their attention in the obedience which He exercised in His Hidden Life, long as was its duration. But for themselves, the subjection of the three-and-thirty years, even though it presents nothing terrible in its outward aspect, would be

more intolerable than the three days of a manifestly humiliating obedience in Jerusalem.

Now, few of us are called upon to encounter the terrors of the latter, even in the mildest form, whilst countless must in some degree, or in some way, be exercised in the obedience of will and judgment - in submission to just authority. Why, then, is it that we will not avail ourselves of the help which the contemplation of the obedience of the Heart of Jesus of Nazareth would afford us? Was it nothing for a God to obey His own creatures - creatures, moreover, who, apart from Mary and Joseph, were gross, ignorant, and uncultivated? Was it nothing for Him who had "measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and weighed the heavens with His palm, who had poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth, and weighed the mountains in scales; before whom the Gentiles are as a drop in a bucket...and the islands as a little dust," (Isaias 40:12-15) - was it nothing, we repeat, for this Mighty One to obey more humbly, more unreservedly, more universally than the most perfect saint who, in a life vowed to obedience, has striven to imitate His example? And what things does He obey? In those which fall to the lot of the most ignorant of His creatures. May we not learn from this the merit of obedience before God, and do we not see also that the insignificance of the material actions, upon which our obedience is to be exercised, detracts nothing from that merit, nay, rather is it an additional circumstance tending but to increase it.

Let us not forget, however, that we are told, Jesus "learned obedience by the things which He suffered," and thus, the obedience of Jesus of Nazareth, from all that we have considered, may be truly numbered among His sufferings. How sweet and easy would the exercise of holy obedience be to the fervent Religious whose soul is filled with the spirit of the Heart of Jesus. He would behold in each most trivial act

which the Rule or his Superior required of him a means of repairing the revolts against the Church and against all authority which are laying waste society. If the actions or labours obedience demanded of him appear insignificant, or perhaps inconsistent with his talents, his mind would revert to the House of Nazareth, and he would behold One there, whose hand had framed the universe, and in whose Divine mind all things had existed and had been assigned their destiny from eternity, and who yet exercised obedience in the most lowly works.

We have, in a previous meditation, remarked how great was the suffering involved in the constraint which, for so long a duration, was placed upon the zeal of the Heart of Jesus, although it thirsted to satisfy the justice of God outraged by sin. All through those long years at Nazareth Jesus was "straitened" for the accomplishment of the "baptism of blood" and every suffering which should accompany it, and the only outlet He found for His burning desire was in an absolute and abject obedience. This was, indeed, part of the Martyrdom of Nazareth which is too little known. If it were more carefully meditated upon, how salutary a help apostolic souls would find in the midst of circumstances which impede their carrying out their generous designs. They would find in obedience a means of "labouring in soul," of suffering, of glorifying God, of meriting grace for others who are tempted, and of repairing by their hidden martyrdom the disobedience of many.

Let us ask Jesus of Nazareth to teach us the value of obedience, that so, appreciating it as it deserves, we may generously embrace the trials we must pass through in order to attain its perfection.

Meditation 16 - Silence of Jesus in the Hidden Life

Silence has ever formed one of the characteristic attractions of hidden souls, whether their vocation required of them external labours and much speaking, or whether it permitted them to retire into the cloister as to a Nazareth. By hidden souls, be it remembered, is not meant persons who, through the simple fact of their vocation, live a more or less secluded life, since there are to be found souls anything but interior in spirit, even though they live in the most absolute solitudes. We refer to souls who, through long habits of prayer and meditation on the mysteries of our Lord, have learned almost insensibly to abide more in Him than in themselves, whose thoughts, aspirations, and desires are hidden within His Heart, who suffer alone with Him, and who find the sweetness of leaning on His breast and making Him their sole confidant far more than compensation for the absence of all human sympathy.

In souls such as these will be found no trace of that talkativeness which is but too common - of that insatiable desire of manifesting in conversation any little knowledge they may have acquired, or any pious sentiments that may have occurred to them - defects which are, as long as they exist, insurmountable barriers to the attainment of an interior spirit. Silence, it is true, is numbered amongst monastic austerities, yet is it also an earthly paradise for souls who have learned to converse heart to heart with God, and to reflect upon the eternal truths.

Now, we have seen in preceding meditations what was the habitual occupation of the Heart of Jesus during the hidden years at Nazareth, The eye of His Soul looked on God His

Father, and His Heart held perpetual commune with Him. Hence what charm could the converse of creatures have for Him? True it is that in His Public Life He freely conversed with all who came to Him, and we find Him sometimes engaged in somewhat prolonged conversations; but it was the salvation or consolation of the souls with whom He conversed that He ever had in view, and it was this alone which drew forth words from His sacred lips.

While still at Nazareth His Ministry had not commenced. He was simply the Son of the obscure carpenter, and therefore He was free to preserve that silence which was so valuable in His eyes, and which throughout all ages has formed for souls, hidden in sacred cloisters, so perfect a model.

The two beings, moreover, each perfect in their degree, who shared with Him the Holy House, were too closely united to His Heart, too familiarly accustomed to His ways, not to have learnt habits of supernatural silence. It was enough to be in His Presence, to hear His footstep, to note His sighs, to meet His eye. Each conveyed its lesson to the heart. Then, again, the gentle words He spoke from time to time had in them an unction and a fullness of meaning which would have sufficed for a lifetime, and even Mary and Joseph, pondering them in their hearts, could not have exhausted all their ravishing beauty.

Thus, Jesus in the House of Nazareth toiled silently at His work, and Mary and Joseph reverently followed His guidance. Could they, perfect as they were in spiritual discernment, have done otherwise? Could they have spoken in the stillness of that mysterious and marvelous communication which was going on in their presence between the Incarnate God and His Father in Heaven?

That Jesus conversed at times with His Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph we cannot deny; but that silence was, for all the reasons we have considered, the normal habit of the House of Nazareth, is, we think, beyond all doubt.

Many who read these lines will ask how it is possible, in ordinary life, to imitate the silence of the House of Nazareth. We cannot indeed attain to it in the same degree, but who amongst us cannot at least learn how to refrain from so many useless words which daily and hourly weaken the energy of souls, and cause so serious a loss to us of that precious time which can never be recalled.

It may, however, be conceded that the example afforded us by the silence of Jesus at Nazareth has a special signification for persons whose state of life demands of them a particular respect for silence, and for the more or less rigorous practice of it according to their vocation.

To all such, silence will be the sovereign means for acquiring habits of recollection and holy prayer. It will familiarize them with the presence of Jesus and enable them to listen to His lightest whisper, and with the eyes of their soul to watch His actions and look on the beauty of His face, as did Mary and Joseph in the sanctuary of Nazareth. Spiritual visits to that sacred abode will teach us to sanctify our actions by performing them habitually in the presence of Jesus, and silence will enable us to converse interiorly with Him, thus enabling us to imitate, not only Mary and Joseph, but also Jesus Himself, who during the silence of those long hidden years, even as He toiled, held unbroken communion with His Heavenly Father.

The silence which is prescribed in all religious houses is a reproduction, more or less close, of the silence of Jesus in the House of Nazareth, and it is for this reason chiefly that it is

termed holy silence. The mode in which our Divine Lord practised silence during His Hidden Life bears a distinguishing mark from the wonderful instances we have of it in the Passion, inasmuch as the former was continuous, extending over many years, and constituted as it were, His normal habit, whereas the latter was chiefly remarkable in this, that He maintained it most rigorously on occasions when terrible outrages were offered to Him, and when His personal honour was attacked, in which it forms one of the grandeurs of the Passion.

Hence it is, that although the silence of our Lord in Jerusalem when in the presence of His impious judges is, and ever will be, the dearest object of our imitation on trying occasions which the Divine Wisdom permits for the test of our virtue, yet as these occasions are ordinarily of rare occurrence, it is the habitual silence of Nazareth which will, in regard of most of us, tell with chief force upon our daily life.

Let us meditate much and frequently upon this long silence of the Incarnate Word, and, while we do so, let us ask Him to give us an ever-increasing light as to the advantages which we shall derive from imitating it in our spiritual life.

Meditation 17 - Mortification of Jesus in the Hidden Life

In order to realize the marvelous example of this virtue which our Divine Lord affords us in the Hidden Life at Nazareth, it will be necessary to recall much that has been considered in the preceding meditations.

The virtue of mortification forms a vital part of the spiritual life, inasmuch as no other virtue can habitually reside in the soul, or be perseveringly practised, without it. By this it will be seen that we are not here speaking simply, or even chiefly, of exterior mortification, but more especially of that of the heart, whence it exercises its influence over every faculty and every sense, interior and exterior.

We not unfrequently hear pious persons speaking of mortification as if it were something altogether exterior, and as if its degree in each soul could be infallibly measured by external appearances. That this is a very great error is proved by the fact that the mortification of the individual soul can be estimated only by a knowledge of its peculiar character, its tastes, capacities, and many other circumstances which are as numerous as the different members of the human race.

There is but one Being of whose mortifications we can form to ourselves anything approaching a just estimate, and we can do this only by reminding ourselves that that one was God Incarnate, that His Kingdom was from everlasting, that His ministers were the angels and the earth His footstool, that the human Heart which He had taken was the purest, the most sensitive that could be formed, His human Soul the most clear in its perceptions, the most noble in all its

faculties. When we have striven to realize all this, and then meditated on the circumstances attending our Lord's sojourn upon earth, and in particular His monotonous life at Nazareth, we may form some faint conjecture of what must have been the mortification which He practised in every moment of that marvelous life.

If His infinite love of the Eternal Father caused Him to find a hidden sweetness in the continual exercise of that painful obedience of which He gives us so rare a model, inasmuch as it enabled Him to repair the outrages which the disobedience of men offer to the Divine Majesty, yet it must not be for a moment forgotten that such obedience was most painful. It necessitated the ceaseless subjection of His human will, and here we must recall what has been considered in the meditation on His obedience, where we have dwelt on the circumstances which rendered it a marvel of interior mortification.

The silence which during His Hidden Life He had imposed upon Himself, although so sweet to Him, yet had in its continued exercise its side of mortification on account of the burning zeal which consumed Him. He knew each error that was being propagated around Him; He knew each soul that was wandering away from the Light through want of a voice to tell it of the truth; yet He, the Living Truth, kept silence because His hour for speaking was not yet come. Was there no mortification here?

As with His obedience, so with the humiliations of His Hidden Life. In order to conjecture the extent of them, we must remember His infinite knowledge of all things, in consequence of His hypostatic union with the Word, as well as the dignity of His Person and all that resulted from it. Yet we have seen Him condescending - without the appearance of condescension - to be taught the most common-place

labour, to be reproved for His want of skill, and to be regarded with contempt, even perhaps by the gross and ignorant Nazarenes themselves, as "the Son of the carpenter."

How His Soul, so delicate in its perceptions, so refined and perfect in all its faculties, must have shrunk from much that He heard and saw around Him! Outside the Holy House how out of harmony must everything have been with the beautiful Paradise He had left! Yet nothing of this appeared in His exterior. Was there no mortification here?

His life at Nazareth, although one of seclusion, was nevertheless essentially a common life. Marvelous as was the sanctity of the sacred inmates of the Holy House, yet in nothing did the least shadow of singularity or exclusiveness haunt them. Thus was Jesus open to the contact, at least at times, of the rough and gross, not only in manners, but in nature. And after all, if we reflect upon it, what companionship could Jesus, the Son of God, find in the most perfect amongst us, were He to regard us in ourselves and destitute of His grace?

We have meditated the deep sources of suffering in the Heart of Jesus, its burning love, its quenchless zeal, its thirst for men's salvation. We have seen, moreover, that it was alone in its sorrows, as no human heart ever was or could be. Nevertheless, year after year Jesus remained at Nazareth, because it was the Father's will, and remained there with His sorrow ever before Him, toiling patiently in Saint Joseph's workshop, as if those humble labours were His only work on earth, being the true model, as long as the world shall last, of long-suffering and of perseverance.

Can we contemplate the Divine Solitary of Nazareth without convincing ourselves that mortification is a deeper thing

than we, perhaps, have ever realized - a virtue without which none other can become a habit in the soul? Let the Religious, who finds the exercise of obedience difficult to nature, ask himself whether he has light or knowledge like that of Jesus of Nazareth to bring into subjection - whether he has His greatness to abase, and whether the points on which he is obedient are less in harmony with his talents and his dignity than they were in Jesus while at work in the carpenter's shop, though possessed of all His Majesty as the Son of God. If he finds that holy silence which his Rule enjoins difficult to observe, or if a too eager zeal draws him into the imagination that he cannot refrain from speaking, let him consider whether he has the motives which may have influenced Jesus in laying aside the long silence that He had imposed upon Himself. If he is reprehended for works which are thought to be done amiss, if he is passed over as one unworthy of esteem or notice, if humiliating circumstances crowd upon him, let him call to mind the Hidden God of Nazareth, and he will surely blush to compare his humiliations, whatever they may be, with those which He who was both Great and Hidden supported so gently, unknown to all around Him save Mary and Joseph.

Nor let us forget that which we have meditated upon in the chapter treating of the loneliness of our Lord in His Hidden Life. Every pang, every suffering, whether interior or exterior, He bore alone, so far as the human sympathy or understanding of others went, and this we may say without any detriment to the intimate union of His Heart with that of His Immaculate Mother, or of His sweet communications both with her and with the gentle Saint Joseph. As for our Lady, we cannot doubt that she measured the extent of His inward sufferings, His humiliations and all that was involved in His obedience, as fully, as perfectly as any pure creature could possibly fathom them. But beneath, what fathomless depths which not even the Immaculate could sound, what

horizons which not even her pure eyes could reach! The Psalms constantly prefigure to us in the person of David, the loneliness of our Lord amid His sorrows, loneliness, inasmuch as no sorrows ever equaled His, and no being upon earth could ever have measured their extent.

Now, to His Humanity, this isolation was a bitter suffering; yet who of those around Him - save the two of the Holy Family - suspected it for a moment? Ever sweet was He, ever gentle, ever shedding genial sunshine around Him, yet with His own sorrow ever before Him, carefully hidden within the cloister of His own Sacred Heart, whence it did not cast so much as a shade upon any one who approached Him. Oh! how sublime a lesson in one of the most difficult practices of mortification is here presented to us. Few are they who can support continual suffering without experiencing some craving, if not for outspoken sympathy, at least for a silent acknowledgment and manifestation of interest in those about them. Fewer still are they who do not reveal impatience of feeling, the irritation of self-love, when that manifestation is withheld. What is needed here to restrain the impulses of nature, but that interior self-discipline, that mortification, which, if practised under the genial influence of the Heart of Jesus, will soon prove efficacious in changing the desert into a fertile garden, wherein we may walk at liberty with the Spouse of our souls, and where, freed from the shackles that once enchained us, we shall soon learn how good it is to be alone with God in our sorrows. Thus it will be seen that for the exercise of all the virtues of a hidden life, mortification is essential. Let us then not proudly vaunt our readiness to stand beneath the Cross of Calvary and share in the torments of the Passion; let us not aspire to climb the mount and practise the austere mortifications required of us there, until we have first gone down to Nazareth, and in that home learnt from the Divine Solitary,

the exercise of daily interior self-discipline, patient
abnegation of our wills, and self-immolation in secret.

Meditation 18 - The Hidden Life, An Example of a Life of Faith

When we contemplate the Life of our Lord Jesus Christ at Nazareth, the nature of His occupations during that long series of years, and the contentment with which He pursued His monotonous round of humble duties, we cannot but admit that His Hidden Life presents an admirable encouragement to those who, being neither occupied amidst the noise and hurry of the world, nor withdrawn from it by works great and glorious in themselves, are painfully impressed with the idea that they are useless in God's service. A hidden life is one of faith, and the Divine Master is the Exemplar of it. The Priest, the Missioner, the Sister of Charity, etc., may and frequently do behold the fruits of their labours either in souls converted to the Church, or in those who have been restored to the practice of their religion through their ministry, or in their success with at least a fair proportion of the little ones confided to their care. But there are others whose mission it is to retrace, in a more special manner, the Hidden Life of Jesus, and this, not only in the cloister, but also in the midst of the world, and into whose daily routine enter none of those external works which render so great glory to God. The lives of such are passed in ordinary material labour, or even in a round of worldly pastimes so irksome for a heart to which the Holy Spirit has breathed and whispered of higher things, or in one of those Religious Orders which are devoted exclusively to the practice of prayer and penance. Amongst these there may be souls that burn with a strong desire to labour for the interests of God, but either their state of life or their circumstances prevent them from doing this in any visible or material way. Let such persons turn their inward eye to their Divine Master engaged in the workshop at Nazareth, and

with the true spirit of faith behold the life He there led during the principal part of His days on earth. Contemplation like to that will teach them to believe and understand how God chooses ways of glorifying Himself, and of effecting His designs for the salvation of the world, very different from those which human wisdom would select.

They will derive, moreover, courage to persevere in their apparently inglorious and useless life, from the new consciousness, to which they will be awakened, that whatever paths in life may have been allotted to them, they can, by animating themselves with the spirit of Jesus Christ, glorify God, and co-operate with Him for the salvation of souls.

Faith in the hidden wisdom of God's dealings is of inestimable value to the soul, and of immense importance in the work of its sanctification. It enables us to adore God in spirit and in truth, renders us quick-sighted in recognizing Him under the most obscure veils, and forms in us the habit of discerning the operations of His Wisdom, His Love, and His other Attributes, in the various events of life. It further raises us above the material things around us, prevents us from attaching too much importance either to the visible success, or to the apparent unsucccess of our endeavours, and enables us to believe that, although the former of these may tend to the glory of God, the latter may - however contrary to the judgments of men - serve for His greater glory. This thought is to a loyal, generous, unselfish heart, even sweeter than the enjoyment of manifest success, for in that might mingle much natural and earthly satisfaction.

This sentiment, which abode in the Heart of Jesus, and supported His Humanity during the long weary years of His Hidden Life, has from Him been communicated to the solitaries, who, while their hearts have been on fire for the

interests of the Church, have been enabled to persevere in their lives of isolation and penance, and to the virgins who, in the same spirit of faith, have embraced lives of ceaseless prayer and abnegation, becoming thus living reproductions of the life of Nazareth.

It is faith in the efficacy of a life hidden in God which sustains, in our days, the hands of those who pray upon "the desert mountains" for the cause of God and of souls, and which encourages other souls, hidden in the midst of the world, to pursue in secret their life of interior virtue, by which they lend so powerful an aid to the Church of God and to all the interests of His glory.

To seem and feel as though we were doing nothing for an interest we have at heart, and yet to believe that our apparent inaction - our divinely arranged incapacity is precisely the way by which we are to contribute to its advancement, this is an act of faith whereby we do greatly glorify God.

In order to attain the abiding spirit of faith in our souls, let us ask our Lord to increase it within us day by day, *Adauge nobis fidem*. (Luke 17:5) Then may we take courage to persevere in the imitation of the Hidden Life, with the view of thus assisting the Church, and of co-operating with the Divine Labourer of Nazareth in the salvation of the world, by the same means which He Himself chose for that end during so many years.

Meditation 19 - Joy of the Sacred Heart During the Hidden Life, In Its Power of Repairing the Glory of God

Having now considered some of the principal sufferings of the Heart of Jesus during His Hidden Life, we shall, in the present meditation, contemplate the joy that habitually resided in His Holy Soul, and pondering on its source endeavour to find a means of sharing in it ourselves.

Suffering of any kind is not in itself pleasing to human nature, and if there were not some high motive urging us to accept it, we should doubtless altogether reject it. That motive we learn from the Heart of Jesus. In the sufferings borne by Him during His Hidden Life, which have been considered in previous meditations, above all, in the humiliations to which we have seen Him subjected, He beheld a sovereign means of repairing His Father's outraged honour, and of promoting His glory - that glory which was dearer to Him than life, more precious than the throne which He had left in Paradise. Hence it was that, when the tide of sorrow rose highest in His Heart, His secret song of joy grew richer and fuller in proportion to it. When wearied with the hard, toilsome, material life He had chosen, one so unfitted to His tastes, that were all fashioned to heavenly things; when the ceaseless constraint to which He was submitted pressed heavily on His human Heart, He yet in the midst of it all, rejoiced because He found at every point the means of accomplishing His one ardent, insatiable desire. Such is the triumph of love, that pure love which rejoices in suffering for the sake of the greater glory of the object beloved.

It is useless to ignore the struggles, difficulties and trials that must be encountered in a spiritual life, difficulties as

varied as are the characters of men, and the circumstances connected with them. Our task lies rather in ascertaining the means, first of supporting sufferings, and afterwards of embracing them generously and joyfully.

For this the Heart of Jesus has been, as we have seen, our mirror. Let the same motive for joy only exist in the soul, and it cannot fail to participate in the joy of the Sacred Heart; for it will have discovered a source whose sweet waters no sorrow can embitter. This is literally to "draw water with joy from the Saviour's fountains." (Isaias 12:3)

This joy however of spirit in the midst of suffering can only emanate from love. In proportion as love of self dies out, God's glory will become our only thought, our only desire; and consequently, every occasion that presents itself as favourable for promoting that glory, however painful it may be to nature, will be welcomed with a holy avidity.

Now, whilst we look steadfastly at Jesus of Nazareth, humbled, despised, poor, often weary, and suffering moreover in His Heart all that we have already contemplated, without ever losing the least degree of that tranquil joy which was habitual to Him, let us draw the contrast between ourselves and Him, and ask our hearts how we are affected when some slight sacrifice is demanded of us, which would promote the glory of God, some sacrifice of our pride, of our opinion, of a portion of our material goods, or of some other creature to which we cling. Then, again, in those who have forsaken the world, and who make profession of following Jesus Christ closely in a religious life, does the thought of God's glory preponderate over every selfish interest, and render them eager of seizing upon every occasion of increasing that glory?.If so, they will have found a treasure which shall ensure to them peace and

contentment under all trials, as well as abiding joy in the Holy Ghost.

Once more, it is folly to deny that a life of sacrifice is painful to nature. It is, for instance, humanly speaking hard that persons of cultivated tastes and early habits of refinement should give themselves year after year to occupations in themselves uninteresting and uncongenial - should accustom themselves to the habits, manners, and ideas of all with whom they may be brought into closest companionship; and it is difficult to submit to persons from whom, if nature were yielded to, they would perhaps instinctively shrink. These and many other trials will present matter for a species of inward crucifixion, which one thought alone - the all-absorbing thought of the Heart of Jesus - can enable us to support with joy.

This thought - the fruit of pure love - will be a balm in every sorrow; it will come like the Angel in the Agony, to strengthen us under difficult trials, in humiliations, in contradictions, in sufferings of all kinds which are, or may be hereafter, rending our hearts; it will dissipate all sadness, and infuse into us a spirit of holy joy flowing from the purest source, namely, the happy thought that by this pang, this sacrifice, this particular humiliation, God's glory will be increased throughout eternity. This is a joy indeed which "no man can take from us," because its source can never fail, its roots are fixed on high - it is independent of all human events, nay, rather their very contrariety will but assist to strengthen them and promote its growth.

The joy which we have contemplated as habitually dwelling in the Heart of Jesus, was not simply the result of conformity to the will of His Father, still less of the remembrance of the reward which would be eternally His, when He had accomplished His work on earth, since beatitude was His by

right, whether He suffered or not. The joy of the Sacred Heart was purely and pre-eminently produced by the consciousness that through His sufferings and humiliations He was repairing the wrongs of God, and promoting His greater glory.

So also is it with us. Beautiful as is the virtue of resignation to God's holy will, filled with encouragement as is the anticipation of the reward reserved for those who suffer patiently, yet something more is needed to impart that joyfulness in suffering which we consider in the Heart of Jesus, it is the motive which has God for its object, rather than ourselves. It must be that loyal love which characterized the glorious Precursor of our Lord, which made him rejoice when he saw himself "decrease" in the estimation of the people, and his Divine Master "increase," which, when asked if he were the Christ, made him answer with such holy and truthful indignation: "I am not." It must be, again, that generous love which animated the great and magnanimous heart of Saint Paul, and caused him to glory only in his infirmities, in order that thereby the power of God might be manifested in Him, and that no virtue might be attributed to himself; that love, which fired the soul of the Saint of later times, Ignatius, who may justly be termed the Apostle of "God's greater glory," in whose noble, aspiring heart grace found so rich a soil in which to plant that holy and insatiable thirst for the glory of his Master and for the exaltation of His Kingdom, which ever after inflamed his heart.

But it is in a hidden life above all others - a life which is not passed in the exercise of works great in themselves - that joy of spirit is so necessary in order to persevere happily and holily in the round of monotonous, and perhaps uninteresting duties, which it offers.

A hidden life is not, as is sometimes believed, a state engendering melancholy, or a misanthropic view of the outer world; yet it cannot be denied that some of those who embrace it become discontented, and give no evidence of that interior joy, upon the source of which we have been meditating. The reason of this is not to be ascribed to the kind of life they have chosen, but to their own egotism, which prevents them from seeking God's glory as their primary object, and consequently deprives them of the joy they would otherwise feel in procuring that glory by self-denial under the innumerable opportunities that continually present themselves. Instead of this, they are preoccupied with a thousand desires, springing forth from their own self-love. Their charity towards God is not strong enough to enable them to forget themselves, and to find their true happiness in immolating all for His interests, who they nevertheless say is their only Love.

Let us earnestly beg our Lord to pour into our hearts that generous love, which sets its joy on promoting the glory of God at its own cost. Thus will our lives, however thickly they may be strewn with thorns, be happy lives, because the motive of our joy, the purest and highest we can propose to ourselves, will be in the centre of our hearts a never-failing source of consolation. But, let us beware of being deluded by the thought that we can only glorify God by actions that are in themselves intrinsically great. Jesus, our Divine Master, had simply led a life, hidden, monotonous, comprising the most common daily actions, when His Eternal Father said: "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Saint Teresa had long and lovingly contemplated the Life at Nazareth, when she said that a single straw raised from the ground by obedience glorified God more than martyrdom suffered through self-love, and that if our love of God is sincere, we shall not regard the kind of action He requires of us, but we shall find a hidden sweetness in doing

whatsoever His will demands, since it is in this He desires to be glorified. Let the greater glory of God be the predominant thought animating us in all our sufferings, in all our actions, in all the events of life; and assuredly there will never be for us a day so clouded that at least one ray of sunshine will not beam forth to gladden us on our way, because we shall possess within us a light of joy, which draws its source from the Heart of Jesus.

Meditation 20 - Joy of the Sacred Heart in Its Power of Attracting Souls

We know that all things were at once present to the mental vision of our Divine Lord. Consequently, in looking forward through the course of ages, if on the one hand He beheld the sins of all mankind, He saw also that long, bright train of the redeemed who should glorify His Father throughout eternity.

He beheld innocent souls - souls preserved by His grace from their earliest childhood - and He knew that they owed their immunity from grievous sin to Himself. It was He who had purchased for them the grace which, bedewing their souls in the early morning of life, maintained them pure and unspotted from the world. It was He who in the hidden years of Nazareth was meriting for them their love of solitude, attracting them to hide themselves in the secret of the face of God, and to embrace lives of obedience and self-denial. He saw other souls whom the world had for a while deluded, turn away from it at length with the weariness of disappointment, seeking for a rest which the world could not give them, and then their thoughts happily wandered far away to scenes very different from the actual ones amongst which they dwelt, and Jesus rose up before their vision, and His Beauty was sufficient for them, and in His Love they found the rest which they needed. Again, He saw others long sin-stained and corrupted - aliens to God and to His commandments - deserters for many dark years from the Church, despising her laws and her sacraments, and they returned at length to pour out their repentant hearts in the Sacrament of Penance, and drink once more of the waters of life that flowed from His Heart in the Mystery of His love - the Ever-Blessed Eucharist. And He knew they owed all this to Himself. Ever as He toiled. He had before Him the vision of

the redeemed - souls sanctified and saved by the grace which He was thus meriting for them - souls drawn by an invisible power to His Sacred Heart, and finding therein that for which they had so long been unconsciously craving.

He beheld some of those who had chosen hard, painful lives growing weary under the pressure of continual self-restraint, but who grew strong again in the remembrance of the long, silent years which He had passed at Nazareth, and who, drawing new life from that memory, would persevere until the end.

We read in the Gospel that, one day, the disciples having returned to our Lord, related to Him with great joy the marvels they had wrought in His Name. Upon this our Lord, though warning them against the vain complacency to which their success might expose them, "in that same hour rejoiced in the Holy Ghost;" and gave thanks to His Eternal Father, because He had "hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and had revealed them to little ones. (Luke 10:21) A like joy already thrilled through His Sacred Heart, and a like thanksgiving mounted therefrom to His Father during the hidden years at Nazareth. He beheld these "His little ones," whose minds would travel back to Nazareth, Genesareth, and Jerusalem, and be charmed with the Beautiful One they would there behold; and, in consequence of that vision of beauty, they would become saints - that is, souls enamoured with the "beauty of holiness" in God Incarnate, and desirous of retracing the same in themselves.

Not vaguely nor confusedly did our Lord behold all this; but distinctly and separately each soul passed before Him, and contributed to the joy of His Heart. You who read these lines, and I who write them, have both most certainly added our share to the sorrows of Jesus, and oh! blessed thought, it is in our own power to contribute also to His joys. In the

stillness of Nazareth He knew us, He watched us, and if we may say so, He trembled for the issue of our struggles betwixt nature and grace; and when He witnessed our victories, when He watched our hearts being softened by the remembrance of His love, how light then seemed the labours and sweet the sufferings of those hidden years! Just as a like prevision made Him feel, in after time, the scourge fall light, and the thorny crown sit gently on His brow.

Can we ourselves have no share in this joy of Jesus of Nazareth? To a certain extent we can, and upon certain conditions. In the first place, our hearts must be fashioned upon that of Jesus Himself. We must love souls for His sake, just as He loved them for the sake of His Father's glory; we must love them, moreover, for their own sake, as being our brethren in Christ, even as He loved them because they were His own brethren. If we love them, we shall yearn for their salvation; and, if we can in any way contribute thereto by co-operation with our Divine Lord, we shall be filled with joy in doing so. It is true, we cannot see at the time, nor have any certainty whatever as to the success of our prayer and impetratory works in behalf of individual souls, but this only renders them more meritorious, and consequently more useful to those for whom we offer them.

How many bitter tears would be rendered sweet, how many painful sufferings light, if only our hearts were capable of the Apostolic love of the Heart of Jesus in its intense zeal for souls. If our mental eye, instead of being preoccupied with selfish calculations, were watching over the multitude wandering without a shepherd, as sheep who had gone astray - souls hungering for the Bread of Life, how might we not merit for them the grace to recognize their True Shepherd, and to surmount all obstacles that would prevent their returning to those fountains of living water, which would spring up within their souls to everlasting life.

Holy priests, and others who have a visible ministry to exercise towards souls, could tell us of the joy, unlike that which the world is able to give, which inundates their hearts when by word or work they have succeeded in leading back some poor wanderers to the Heart of Jesus, or in drawing them to appreciate His Beauty, and so to consecrate themselves to His love.

Their holy joy may well, we think, be something akin to that which must have thrilled through the Heart of Jesus, when Philip, after having listened to the eloquence of his Divine Master in speaking of His Eternal Father, exclaimed: "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." (John 14:8)

Now, what may be wrought for the sanctification of souls by a visible ministry, can be no less effected by an invisible ministry, of prayer and impetration. It is this that we learn in the Holy House of Nazareth, and the knowledge possessed by our Lord then of His power of meriting for souls, until the end of time, the grace to draw near to Him, and through Him to His Father, was a perpetual fount of light in His Sacred Heart. So may it be in the case of those whose co-operation with Him is altogether hidden. Not a repugnance overcome, not a duty of state performed with fidelity, not an uninteresting labour persevered in, but may win for a soul, or for innumerable souls, the grace to know Jesus and to love Him; provided only that His love already reigns in the hearts of those who co-operate with Him, without which indeed there could be no real co-operation.

Let us, then, pray incessantly that our hearts may grow in likeness to the Heart of the Divine Solitary of Nazareth. Thus shall we be able, not only to share in His blessed sorrows - so full of sanctification for ourselves - but likewise, in His all-holy joy, which will be for us no less sanctifying in its influence upon our spiritual life.

Meditation 21 - Joy of the Heart of Jesus of Nazareth in the Vision of Its Eternity

In the exquisite prayer which our Lord made to His Eternal Father, on the night before He died, He exclaims: "Father, the hour is come.... I have glorified Thee on earth; I have finished the work which Thou gave Me to do. And now glorify Thou Me, O Father, with Thyself, with the glory which I had before the world was, with Thee." (John 17:1,4,5) It would seem as if the thought of His near return to the Bosom of the Father, and to that glory which He had possessed with Him before the world was, brought to Him a rest and a balm which His Human Nature needed on that awful night, seeing that its agonies were so fast approaching. Was it the first time, within the three-and-thirty years, that the vision of His eternal beatitude with the Father flooded His Soul with joy, and formed the consolation of His Sacred Heart, or was this not rather the abiding sunlight which ever illuminated the shadows of His earthly sojourn?

Our Lord, speaking by the mouth of David, said: "I thought upon the days of old, and I had in my mind the eternal years... and I was comforted." (Psalm 76:16) How deep becomes the sense of those words when applied to our Divine Lord! He bore in His remembrance the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. It was with Him, no speculative supposition regarding the magnitude or the kind of blessedness which would be His, when His exile should have ended. It would be but a return to the bosom of His Father, whom He had left only to accomplish the mission for which that Father had sent Him upon earth; a re-entrance into that glorious Kingdom, that beautiful Paradise which was His by right, but which He had taught us, in His

Humanity, was to be gained only by suffering. Yes, He had in His mind the eternal years, even whilst He toiled in Joseph's workshop, and whilst the sweat stood out upon His brow, and whilst His Heart was pierced through with the vision of sin which, as we have seen, was ever stretched out before Him; and the memory of that glory He had with the Father before the world was, and to the re-possession of which He was now each day drawing nearer, flooded His Soul with a joy, which it is not given to us to comprehend.

Some of the saints, as well as other holy persons, have had a special attraction for meditating on the eternal life of God before Creation. Such meditation, where there is a drawing towards it, is likely to have a very marked hallowing influence upon the soul; and the entire character of the spiritual life of the person so drawn towards it might and very probably would be formed upon its lines. The intellect occupied with such a subject would pass over unnoticed many a material object, which to another would be a source of fretfulness and embarrassment, and thus an impediment to its spiritual advancement. The thought of that tranquil self-sufficing Life "before the world was," before the angelic host was yet created to adore the Triune God, the thought of the Eternal Decrees reaching from end to end and ordering all things even to the Day of Doom, would communicate a marvelous reverence to the soul for the least appointments of the Divine Will, Wisdom, and Love whence they emanate. Such a soul would not, and could not satisfy, its eye with secondary causes; it would involuntarily take its flight to the eternal years before Creation, and would trace back to those sublime heights the cause of all things ordained or permitted.

Lastly, it would possess within it the sanctifying yearning for those eternal years when time shall be no more, when the Eternal Decrees upon which it had so loved to meditate on

earth shall have been entirely accomplished, and Heaven itself shall burst upon his enraptured vision in all its splendour. Little would such a soul be allured by the transient and empty joys or splendours of earth. The habitual thought of the eternal years would have rendered all these insipid and worthless, and though life should be overshadowed with darkest clouds of sorrow, there would still be deep within the soul that we have been depicting, a well-spring of hallowed joy which nothing could exhaust.

Now, if it is thus with those to whom God has given this attraction, what must have been the effects of the remembrance of the Eternal Years in the Sacred Heart of Him, who was at once both God and Man? In consequence of His union with the Word, His knowledge, we know, was infinite. From thence, what floods of light, of joy, of beatitude inundated His Holy Soul amidst the sorrows and toils of His exile? Above all, in the stillness and monotony of His life at Nazareth, when His outward actions seem least in harmony with the immense work that lay before Him - -least in accordance, too, with the dignity of His Person and the sublimity of His mission - we love to penetrate by meditation and prayer into His interior, and contemplate His mind occupied with the thought of Eternity. What was not comprised in that thought within the mind of Jesus, while we listen to the throbbing of His Sacred Heart, as it thrilled with the joy which the thought of Eternity conveyed to it!

If it is given but to a few to delight in meditation on the Eternal Life of God, if none among us can participate in the knowledge which conveyed such joy to the Human Heart of Jesus, there is no one who may not at least share His joy in anticipating His return to the Father's bosom, to His own beautiful Paradise which He had left but for the sake of us.

Although, unlike our Divine Lord, that Paradise is not ours by right - although, unlike Him, we have no foreknowledge of what is there reserved for us, yet this we do know infallibly, that Heaven is the assemblage of all good without any admixture of evil, that there we shall possess God without any fear of ever losing Him, and that consequently nothing which the human heart can desire, or the human mind conceive, will there be left unsatisfied.

Why is it, that with this faith living within us, and with the hope animating us, that we shall obtain what our faith teaches us to look forward to, we are yet so chained down either by the cares and sorrows of this life, or by its delusive pleasures, that we seem unable to lift up our hearts to those eternal mansions which our Lord, nevertheless, assures us He went to prepare for us? Is it not that charity is languishing within us, and that, the object of our desires not being in Heaven above, our minds but seldom ascend thither, for "where our treasure is, there will our heart be also."

We do not in any way mean to advance that the desire of an eternal reward should be the chief motive prompting us to support the miseries of this life cheerfully; but rather that our hearts, if they are in any way like the Heart of Him on whom we are meditating, will involuntarily mount up, like His, to the bosom of His Father and our Father, because there will be the term of all we hope for - the Eternal Home, the Everlasting Rest, the only ideal of perfect happiness - because there, and there only, will be the satiety of our love.

To the mourner then, whose heart, it seems, will never again be healed; to the souls, struggling with and almost succumbing beneath long temptations and desolating trials in their spiritual life; to those bereft of all that can render this life in any way enjoyable, we would whisper the word

that resounds in our ears daily from the altar - *Sursum corda*. This invites us to forget earth's shadows, and mount up, in spirit, to the Eternal Sanctuary into which our great High Priest has entered, and where He is preparing a mansion for each one of us. How healing a balm is conveyed, in those two little words, to the soul of the believer, especially when sorrow has wrought in him its blessed chastening work of detachment; so that his thoughts have begun already to be cast in a heavenly mould, and each one to share in the involuntary yearning of his entire being for his Everlasting Home.

Let us think often - nay, if it could be incessantly - upon the Eternal Years, on the mansion which Jesus is preparing for us, on our endless rest in the bosom of the Father. Let this remembrance be our solace, our soul's rest, our heart's joy, even as the same thought formed the abiding joy of the Heart of Jesus, amidst the toils and sufferings of His long Hidden Years at Nazareth.

Meditation 22 - Tranquility and Peace of the Heart of Jesus in the Hidden Life

The Royal Psalmist, the figure of our Lord, exults in the thought that by the Divine appointment, "the day goes on" - that is, all things are either formally willed or permitted by Him whom no creature can resist: and then he adds, in confirmation, as it were, of what he has advanced, and carrying on his thought in the generous love and joy of his heart: "for all things serve Thee." (Psalm 118:91) That which David sang ages before, was the abiding thought of the Sacred Heart, even as it has been the secret of the peace with which innumerable saints, who have caught the spirit of the Heart of Jesus, have remained constant and unshaken amidst the storms that have buffeted them here below.

Sublime, indeed, is the figure of our Divine Lord as we contemplate Him toiling at Nazareth, as though for Him there were no other work on earth to do than to saw, and plane wood, and fashion rude implements of agriculture, but sublimer still the unruffled peace, the grand tranquility of His Sacred Heart, despite His full knowledge of the false doctrines, the errors, the follies that were being propagated around Him, the darkness in which as yet the whole world was lying, and which He alone could dissipate. Despite His consuming zeal to make known His Father to men and to attract them to His love, notwithstanding His all-holy thirst to communicate to them that eternal life, which He had come down on earth to bring them - the knowledge, the true knowledge of "the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom He had sent," (John 17:3) - yet He remained in Joseph's workshop without a ruffle to stir the grand tranquility of His Holy Soul. Beautiful in His calmness, majestic in His

simplicity, we behold in Him the excellence, the perpetual order of the Father's will. Although all seemed to human reason going wrong, or, to say the least, at a standstill, so far as the evangelization of the world was concerned, yet Jesus was content. While the long monotonous years succeeded each other at Nazareth, the same unruffled peace abode in His Sacred Heart, and offered its silent tribute of praise to His Father. His apparent inaction was an appointment of the Father's will - the realization of an eternal decree: by His ordinance each day went on in its appointed course, and Jesus knew that all things serve that will from whence they originally emanate, and this was enough.

Pax multa diligentibus legem tuam: et non est illis scandalum. The truth of these words is above all verified in the Saint of Saints, on whose Sacred Heart, together with its wonderful lessons for ourselves, we are meditating.

Much peace have they who love Thy law; and to them there is no stumbling-block." {Psalm 118:165) Now, the law of God is one and the same thing as His holy will, so that there is not a verse of the Psalm, from which the above words have been quoted, which may not be applied to the praise of the Divine will and the delight of the just soul in its accomplishment.

In what heart, then, has the will of God ever been so paramount as in the Human Heart of Jesus, and if Saint Teresa, in the exuberance of her love, could say, "How sweet it is to suffer in doing the will of God!" what must have been the abiding sentiment of Him who declared that. His "meat was to do the will of Him who sent Him"!

Thus, in the midst of all we have dwelt upon in this as well as in preceding meditations, an unbroken peace reigned within the Sacred Heart, so that no event, however

seemingly adverse, no course of circumstances, the lengthened duration of which would have rendered them intolerable to us, could have offered any stumbling-block to our Lord. "All things serve Thee." That word which announces the Divine will, and goes forth from the mouth of God, "shall not return to Him void, but shall do whatsoever He pleases, and shall prosper in the things for which He sent it." (Isaias 55:11) Such was the infallible source of the Divine peace reigning in the Heart of Jesus, which, for all the causes we have considered, as will become gradually clearer to us in the light of prayer, was still more marvelous and Divine in the silence of the hidden years at Nazareth than it was afterwards, even amidst the outrages and agonies of the Passion.

Our Blessed Lord, before He left this world, promised us a peace such as this world cannot give, and He particularly signalized the blessing He was going to bestow upon us as His peace: "My peace I give unto you." (John 14:27) It is, then, the peace of His own Sacred Heart that we may, if we will possess as our own, but only on the condition that we endeavour to render our hearts like to that of Jesus. If the same mind is not in us, if the same loyal sentiments towards our Father who is in Heaven, the same contentment consequently with all His appointments, whether regarding ourselves personally or others, are not found in our hearts, in vain shall we hope to possess within us any degree of the peace of the Heart of Jesus, because the very source of His peace will be wanting to us.

If our love of the Father were loyal, disinterested love, we should be indifferent as to the means which His Wisdom makes choice of for bringing about His designs. We should possess within us the infallible certainty that His will would not fail of being accomplished, that "all things serve Him;" and therefore, whether things are in accordance with our

narrow views and human judgments, or not, whether they are agreeable to our desires and inclinations, or otherwise, will be to us immaterial, since the good pleasure of God, and not our own, the accomplishment of His eternal designs, and not the carrying out of our own selfish plans, will be the supreme object of our desire. Herein lies the secret of true interior peace.

Why is it then that the best of us seem to be ever distrusting the Eternal Wisdom, as if it were capable of failure in conducting all things to their appointed end? Why are we so hopelessly prejudiced in favour of our own importance that we allow ourselves to be troubled and to act as if Almighty God could not accomplish His work without us? Again, it is our egotism, our restlessness, our short-sightedness which blind us and so prevent our seeing and practically believing that "God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts."

Let us look at Jesus of Nazareth, let us penetrate into the undisturbed peace and tranquility of His Sacred Heart. True, we have not His Divine knowledge enabling us to see how all things are being infallibly conducted to their end. But it must be remembered that the very science which illuminated His Holy Soul, and communicated such peace to His Sacred Heart, revealed to Him, at the same time, all the evil which was running riot through the world, the errors, the blindness, and the outrages to truth, whilst He remained quietly, silently at Nazareth, as though He were not Himself the only One who could enlighten the darkness, as though He were not at once, the Way, the Truth, and the Light.

Who amongst us has such reason on his side, so great motives, as our Divine Lord had for taking an active co-operation in carrying out the Divine plans? Yet He remained tranquilly at Nazareth until the hour had arrived, decreed

from all eternity for entering on His Public Life. Why can we not learn from Him to believe that we are really co-operating with God, when we are contented to do the work He appoints for us, to remain occupied in that work as long as He wills, although it should apparently render us inactive in the cause of God, and bury ourselves in oblivion? If we can, by prayer and meditation, learn this lesson of the Divine Solitary of Nazareth, great will be our peace, which no seemingly adverse circumstances will have power to mar or interrupt.

Meditation 23 - The Hidden Life Our Model as a Preparation for Heroic Actions

To affirm that the long practice of solid virtue is the most sure preparation for the performance of heroic actions, the occasions of which may afterwards present themselves, is to utter a truism. We will, therefore, keeping in view the maxim we have laid down, consider this subject from another point, in order that the heart may be convinced as well as the reason.

Love is the mainspring of all true heroism, for it brings into action the desire of doing good to, and suffering for, the object loved. Whence it follows that everything which fosters love becomes a means of fitting the soul for the endurance of great sufferings, or for undertaking difficult works. Now a hidden life is peculiarly adapted to form this great virtue within us, inasmuch as it is a life passed alone with God, as we have seen in former meditations. Its spiritual associations are laid far away amid the spots where Jesus lived and wrought while He was on earth; or else, perhaps, amidst the dazzling light of that eternity wherein images have faded out of sight, and the soul only knows that she dwells in the bosom of God her Father, that she is there at rest. Now a life thus removed from the materializing influences of the world is ever advancing in the knowledge, and consequently in the love of God, who communicates Himself to such a one with special delight and abundant liberality. He has promised by the mouth of His Prophet, "I will lead her into the wilderness: I will speak to her heart" (Osee 2:14), and the Divine words whispered to the soul in that solitude are never to be forgotten.

Thus has it been with the saints. Solitude with God has ever laid the first foundation of their future sanctity, and their thoughts have reverted to the remembrance of this whenever they would draw fresh courage for the difficulties they had afterwards to encounter. Out of the thousands of examples which might be cited, let us take that of Saint Ignatius, whose memory in his after life ever travelled back with such tender affection to the grotto of Manresa, in the solitude of which the first seeds of his future spiritual greatness had been sown. Let us also call to mind all that the martyrs have written from their silent dungeons, describing to us the superabundance of the Divine communications granted to them there, and converting their lonely prisons into a very heaven.

But even where consolation has not been so freely bestowed, there is still in solitude the same special facility afforded for union with God to the soul which loves Him, the same advantages resulting from the removal of external influences. Let it not be forgotten, that in speaking of a hidden life, we do not refer exclusively to a mere material solitude, but rather to an inner solitude of the heart and mind. Hence even persons whose lot is cast among the distractions of the world, may apply to themselves all that is here laid down, just as much as Religious within their life of seclusion.

In order to bring this truth more home to the hearts of all - the efficacy, namely, of the hidden life as a means of preparing the soul for great sufferings or difficult undertakings, let us consider the ordinary effect of long and affectionate intercourse between two persons whom circumstances have withdrawn from the society of others. Let us suppose, for example, that some misfortune has thrown two members of the same family exclusively together for a long period of years, how their mutual

affection becomes intensified, above all, when suffering sanctifies it, rendering their hearts but as one. If, in after years they are separated, how their memory reverts to that time of intimate mutual intercourse undisturbed by the presence of any third person, and how their love nourishes itself on that remembrance and grows yet stronger as each circumstance, and word, and even expression of voice during that hallowed past comes back to them. So, likewise, in the spiritual life there are seasons which most of us can recall, when we have in a special manner participated in the Hidden Life of Jesus, when either some particular grace, or great sorrow, or corporal malady has withdrawn us from the outer world, and we have learnt to live alone with God, and He has spoken to our hearts. Such are precious seasons, which we have afterwards loved to bring to mind, and by that remembrance have probably received new motives and incentives to serve the Heart of Jesus with greater fidelity, and to correspond with greater generosity and fervour to the demands of His love.

Let such seasons, then, be for us a House of Nazareth, wherein we may attain the habit of living in God, and may thus prepare ourselves for whatever He may require of us afterwards.

In the preceding meditations we have studied closely the Life of our Lord Jesus Christ at Nazareth. We have seen the interior occupation of His Sacred Heart, we have watched Him in prayer, we have dwelt upon His sufferings. His humiliations, His ceaseless self-abasement and subjection. Then, in the first part of the present chapter, it has been shown that a life passed in the imitation of the ^ example left us by our Lord at Nazareth, is the surest preparation for the performance of heroic actions, if such should hereafter be demanded of us - a preparation, gentle yet austere, for the endurance of future sufferings; inasmuch as a hidden

life is, as we have seen, one of intimate union with God, as well as of severe, interior mortification.

Let us remember, in the first place, that unbroken union of His Holy Soul with His Eternal Father amidst His labours at Nazareth, which we have, before everything else, desired to keep in view throughout the course of these meditations, because on our own recollection and union with God, in solitude of heart, depends the whole efficacy of a hidden life for us. Without this condition, indeed, we cannot imitate the life of Jesus at Nazareth. At that time, it is true, the crown of thorns did not actually press upon His brow, but already it encircled His Heart, there to remain while He laboured with His hands; and, we have seen how deeply He felt its anguish. The material Cross was not as yet laid upon His shoulders, but the weight of the whole world's sin lay, day and night, upon His Heart; and year after year He supported in secret this terrible burden. The blasphemy and scorn of the people of Jerusalem were not as yet hurled against Him, but the coarse reproofs of His employers were His preparation for that humiliation.

These and many other circumstances manifest the analogy between our Lord's Hidden Life and the remaining portion of His sojourn on earth, and they also place before us an example of the practice of solid interior virtues in a hidden life as a preparation for what may follow hereafter. Vain, otherwise, would be our desires of accomplishing extraordinary works, of enduring great sufferings, perhaps of undergoing martyrdom itself. We must follow the order which Incarnate Wisdom has traced out for us, seeing that our Lord began His life in the obscurity of Nazareth.

Let us, then, often recur in thought to that Holy House, as Jesus Himself did amidst the weariness of His Public Ministry, and the tumult of the Passion, as also Mary did when, the

world's salvation having been accomplished, Jesus ascended to His Father, leaving her alone to suffer still longer on earth. How often must not the Mother's thoughts have gone back fondly to the quiet spot where she had dwelt so many years with Jesus, recalling His words, His tones and gestures; and, although sadness was mingled with that memory, by reason of the very contrast to it of her present life without Him, nevertheless, she derived therefrom a special grace, inasmuch as through it the tide of her love rose still higher in her soul.

Thus will it be with us if we endeavour to live in solitude with God. Let us, we repeat, often in spirit go to Nazareth, as so many of the saints have done, above all when visited by trial and sorrow. If we have familiarized ourselves with its sacred associations in meditation and prayer, and have aimed at leading a life conformed to the Divine Model there proposed to us, it will be for us a peaceful home', where our souls may find rest amidst the noise and distraction of the world, or the weariness of affliction and temptation.

Let us, moreover, earnestly entreat the Heart of Jesus to attract us to Him, in His Hidden Life, that we may obtain the grace of living in union with Him at Nazareth, and so preparing ourselves for the trials that may be awaiting us in the outer world.

Meditation 24 - The Merit of a Hidden Life

In order to convince ourselves of the immense merit of a life formed upon that of our Lord at Nazareth, it would appear sufficient to call to mind what the Gospel relates as having taken place when He was baptized by Saint John. "And behold a voice from Heaven, saying: This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17)

Now, it will be remembered that, when the Eternal Father thus publicly manifested His complacency in His Divine Son, Jesus had as yet wrought no miracle. He had not yet begun to preach, or to go about Judea and elsewhere, doing good. He had but toiled in the workshop of Saint Joseph, as the carpenter of Nazareth, and had led the common life incidental to that humble condition.

But a hidden life is, for all, essentially the life of the heart, and it is because it is the life of the Heart of Jesus that we in a special manner study it during the years He passed at Nazareth. This renders that portion of His earthly career so peculiarly useful for us all, but it does so in a remarkable degree for those who, not being called to the performance of great actions, or to a visible apostolate, must necessarily effect their share of work for the glory of God, in a hidden manner.

We have learnt, then, in the school of Nazareth, that the efficacy of our lives for promoting the glory of God and His interests consists not in the performance of marvellous works, but in the purity of our intention, in the ardour of our love, and in the similarity of our desires to those of the Heart of Jesus. This is that desire of the poor which God will hear so

favourably - this is that preparation of hearty which He will accept as so grateful to Him.

Consider how rich a fund of consolation is contained in remembering the merit before God of a hidden life - consolation, especially for those apostolic hearts who thirst to labour for God, but who are precluded from doing so by other than secret means.

We have seen how large a share subjection had in the life our Blessed Lord spent at Nazareth, not only as prompting and directing His obedience in externals, but as the subjection of His interior feelings - that human element which dwelt in Him as the consequence of the nature He had assumed. Now, it is this which forms the principal merit of a hidden life, whether it is led in the midst of the world, or withdrawn from it in a state involving the additional restraints of holy Religion.

When persons in the world hear of the fall of any member of a Religious Order, or the loss of a vocation, one of those scandals which our Lord said "must needs come," (Matthew 18:7), they almost invariably ascribe it to exaggerated austerity of life, or to undue seclusion, or some exterior cause. But if this evil were traced to its origin, it would most frequently be found that the evil began through the pride of the human spirit rising up in revolt against that subjection of the will and judgment, which ever is, and ever will be, so difficult to nature, and consequently so meritorious; and it is chiefly in this subjection that consists the superior merit of the religious state to the merit of any other kind of life. Every state, however, is, as has been seen, capable of participating in the merit of a hidden life, inasmuch as it regards the life of the heart, the inner life.

This has been fully manifested in the course of the preceding meditations; and it remains for us but to consider one or two instances, if we would render the application more close and fruitful to ourselves.

We have seen to what an extent interior renunciation is necessary in order to lead a life really hidden in God, after the example of Jesus of Nazareth; how constantly that pride must be wrestled with, which ever seeks its own glory, ever craves for honour and distinction; how egotism must be crushed, thirsting, incessantly as it does, after notice, favour, and praise from others, and always nervously afraid of neglect or oblivion.

There are, moreover, other fertile sources of merit, such as, for example, secret and unsuspected sufferings, whether of mind or body. The whole world may, perhaps, be cognizant of some great sorrow laid upon us; but how often are there in it aggravating circumstances which, like hidden thorns, are ever piercing our wounded hearts, although no one who knows us even suspects it. These are the secret nails of the Cross, causing an anguish known only to Jesus, and they are the most meritorious part of our sufferings.

Again, how many are there who, conceiving the desire of an apostolic or religious life, are precluded nevertheless from realizing their aspirations. Is their life, on that account, rendered unavailable for the great end they have in view? Certainly not. Their desires are indeed destined never to be realized by the particular form of success they aimed at; but, if they know how to sanctify their disappointed hopes by uniting them to the interior sufferings of the Sacred Heart, and by offering their life of disappointment to promote the same interests as those for which they had desired to work by exterior and visible means, they will infallibly attain the true goal. Their lives will be as efficacious for the cause they

had at heart as if they had accomplished in deed as well as in desire all they had hoped for. They will be masters of the hidden life, secret victims of the Heart of Jesus, and true apostles, unknown indeed upon earth, but for whom, perhaps, a martyr's crown is prepared in Heaven.

Lastly, when we reflect on the merit of a hidden life, let us not be selfish in our calculations. Let us desire to merit, not for ourselves alone, but above all for the interests of God's glory, for His Church, for souls. We shall have no cause to regret such unselfishness at the hour of death. "Be solicitous for My interests," said our Lord to Saint Teresa, "and I will take care of thine."

Meditation 25 - The Hidden Life of Our Lord Reproduced in the Blessed Sacrament

We know by faith that the whole life of our Lord on earth is renewed in His Sacramental Life upon our altars - *Memoriam fecit mirabilium suorum*. Thus each of us can meditate, in His very presence, on that portion of His Life and Passion to which we feel most powerfully attracted. Now, if there be one portion of His previous life which seems more clearly and faithfully reproduced than another in the Blessed Sacrament, it surely is His Hidden Life. This thought is so eloquently developed in the work entitled *L'Apostolat de la Priere*, by Father Ramtere, S.J., that we cannot do better than quote some passages from it. The fame and excellence of this valuable work may have rendered it familiar to many of our readers, but they especially, we think, will not find these passages out of place, in connection with the subject under consideration.

"What was His occupation during those long years of His Hidden Life at Nazareth? ... He prayed; and thus at Nazareth, as efficaciously as upon Calvary, He wrought out the salvation of mankind. Nazareth! this single word speaks more forcibly in favour of the Apostleship than any treatise or argument. These thirty years of hidden life would be incomprehensible to us did we not look upon them as a glorious exemplification of the power which the meanest occupations possess, when animated by zeal and prayer, to obtain grace from Heaven and the salvation of souls. ... He unceasingly dwells in our tabernacles that this spirit (of prayer) may remain always equally active, in the bosom of the Church. How eloquent is the lesson given us by our Divine Saviour from His silent throne, where He repeats all

the teachings of His Life! Let us pause for a moment and listen whilst we try to comprehend this enduring mystery of love and prayer. What does Jesus Christ do in the Holy Eucharist? Apparently nothing, but in reality everything. This is His Life in the Blessed Sacrament.... Through the length of the day He prays, and whilst all around Him is in a state of excitement and commotion, whilst ungrateful man forgets his heavenly country, despises and denies his Saviour, neglects the care of his own soul, and sacrifices his eternal interests to perishable and frivolous occupations, the suppliant voice of the Divine Mediator appeals in his behalf from the depths of His tabernacles. Through the length of the night also He prays, and whilst His rational creatures, buried in sleep, have no longer intelligence to know or will to love their Creator, Jesus Christ lives, knows, adores, loves, and prays unceasingly for them - *Semper vivens ad interpellandum pro nobis*. Generations disappear, each in its turn, from the world's stage, year succeeds year, age follows age; but Jesus Christ remains ever living, ever praying, and by His prayers bringing sanctification to generations, and new worshippers to His Heavenly Father, thus realizing the ancient figure of perpetual sacrifice. So is He ever in the midst of us, as our living and substantial prayer, in a word, from the Tabernacle souls are saved and life is shed abroad upon the earth."

Could there be found a more faithful reproduction of the Hidden Life of our Lord than that Sacramental Life so eloquently described in the few lines quoted above? If it is objected by those who have but superficially considered the life of our Lord at Nazareth, and whose appreciation of it consequently has been limited to His external occupations, that there is to be found in His Mystic Life upon the altar no reproduction of His manual labour, of His common every-day life in the Holy House, we reply that neither is there in the Adorable Sacrament any visible reproduction of His Public

Life or Passion, yet to the mind and heart of the believer how real, though mystic, it is! *Memoriam fecit mirabilium suorum.*

It is also to be remembered that although our Lord, in His Hidden Life, gave to all succeeding generations the example of labour as being the special penance imposed upon man after the Fall by Almighty God Himself yet the manual labour in which we see Him occupied for so many years of His Life, was far from being His principal occupation.

During the life at Nazareth our Lord was rendering actual service to the world, equal to that which He would afterwards render in His Public Life, and in His Passion. Each moment was of priceless value, a value which suffered no diminution from its being concealed from the knowledge of men. This service was chiefly rendered by the ceaseless prayer which, as we have seen, mounted from His Sacred Heart to the Father's bosom during those hidden years.

The prayer which Jesus offered contained in itself the four great ends of sacrifice - adoration, thanksgiving, mediation, and impetration. Let us go in the spirit of faith to the silent Tabernacle, and there reverently kneel and meditate in the very Presence of the Divine Solitary of Nazareth, who still continues His life-long service to the world, still loves, still prays, still by the might of His prayer holds back His Father's arm from striking the rebellious nations, and the souls that have grown hardened in sin, and is still, for countless numbers of His creatures, the secret source of the graces that are streaming in upon their souls, and drawing them closer and closer to Himself.

Not only is it the Prayer of the Hidden Life which is perpetuated in the Adorable Sacrament of the Altar. We find His poverty there also but too faithfully reproduced.

Surrounded frequently by the dwellings of the rich, He, the hidden God of all creation, reposes in churches devoid of ornament, upon an altar whereon no traces of aught is to be found that could suggest the Presence of the King of Kings, in a Tabernacle rough and common as was the little House at Nazareth, and everything else in keeping with it.

If we wish to behold the obedience and humility of Jesus of Nazareth perpetuated before our eyes, again let us turn to Him in His Sacramental Life; where we shall see Him obedient to His creatures once more, remaining in His Tabernacle or coming forth therefrom, or set up on His altar-throne for Exposition, according to their will. They bear Him whither they will, and to whom they will. Nay, alas! He submits sometimes to the humiliation of being obliged to enter into souls defiled with sin. He does the will of all, and He makes no resistance. In the same way as at Nazareth He remained silent, despite the evils that He knew were going on around Him, and the erroneous doctrines that were being taught, so now He speaks not, although nothing occurs of which He has not a perfect knowledge.

How wonderful a mystery of faith is the silence of God upon our altars. What evils are running riot through the world, what storms of rebellious passions rage even in the actual Presence of the Blessed Eucharist, what multitudes of false doctrines are leading the unwary astray, yet Jesus is silent. No longer is His voice heard upon the troubled waters commanding the storm to cease - no longer does He confute the errors of the modern Sadducees and Pharisees, nor bid souls, whom the world has long claimed for its own, to leave all things and follow Him. How often, perhaps, do such men as we have described, approach within a few feet of Him who abides there in His Sacramental Presence! One word from Him would convince them of the errors of their sins, and cause others to despise their aimless lives and to become

His for ever. Yet that word Jesus speaks not. He has returned to His old habits of Nazareth. He prays, He pleads incessantly for all, but He will be obedient to the laws of that state in which He has placed Himself, and silence is a part of that mystic state, as it belonged to His Life at Nazareth. His action upon the world, upon souls, is hidden. Not even the children of the Church realize the efficacy of the Life of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, or the magnitude of the influence which He exercises from thence over them and over the entire world. Truly, then, is that mystery of faith and of love wherein we adore the "hidden God," a reproduction, as we have said, of the Hidden Life at Nazareth.

Have we ever formed to ourselves an idea of the efficiency of a life modelled - as to its interior spirit - upon that Sacramental Life of Jesus in the Tabernacle? The lessons which He so silently yet so eloquently gives us there, are but the epitome of those which He gives us, equally silently, from the Holy House of Nazareth. From the former, as from the latter. He forms us to habits of ceaseless prayer, of silence, of obedience, poverty, and humility, but above all He teaches us that truth, so difficult to be comprehended by the greater number, so repugnant to the activity and egotism of human nature even when comprehended, that the efficacy of a life for the glory of God and for the interests of souls consists, not in those actions which can "be seen of men," but rather in those which "the Father sees in secret," and which are ignored by men.

The fruit of meditation on the Sacramental Life of Jesus being, from this point of view, in all respects similar to that on the Hidden Life, it is needless to repeat here what has been laid down in preceding chapters, for application to ourselves. It remains but to invite those who have not yet followed the practice, to draw out for themselves in their meditation the analogy between the Lives of Nazareth and

of the Holy Eucharist. Let others who find too great difficulty in calling before them the scene of Christ's Hidden Life, eighteen centuries ago, kneel before the silent Tabernacle and contemplate there the faithful reproduction of that Life abiding in our very midst.

Let them do more than this. In order that their meditation may have lasting and effective results, it should enable them to appreciate a life hidden in God, yet in its very hiddenness, most active for all the interests of His glory. It should render them contented to be forgotten, to be neglected and ignored, then will it be their consolation that none of these circumstances can prevent them from glorifying God, or working for the good of souls, but rather enables them to labour more efficaciously for the eternal interests of men, inasmuch as their labour is less esteemed by others, and consequently bears a closer resemblance to the means which Jesus chose during the greater part of His Life, for effecting the salvation of the world.

Meditation 26 - The Hidden Life of Jesus Reproduced in Contemplative Orders

It entered into the designs of our Blessed Lord that His Hidden Life should be perpetuated, not only in His own Divine Person upon the altar, but also by a portion of the members forming His Mystic Body - the Church.

That there are hidden souls in every state and condition of life cannot be doubted. Of these, indiscriminately, we shall not treat in the following meditation, but confine ourselves at present to the consideration of the perpetual memorial of the Life in the Holy House as presented to us by the Contemplative Orders in the Church.

It is well known that the utility of those Religious Orders which are not devoted to active works of charity is a point much contested, even by good practical Catholics. Any doubt, however, as to their utility ought to be removed from the minds of those who have at any time made the Life of our Lord at Nazareth the subject of meditation. It would be needless to repeat here what has been stated in the preceding meditations, not only as to the manner of life led by our Lord during the hidden years, but likewise as to His interior occupation, which was the life of His Heart. It will be necessary but to keep in mind that the period passed at Nazareth was not simply a time of waiting and delay until the hour had arrived for commencing the actual work of our Lord's life. The truth is that our Lord would not have anticipated, by a single instant, the time fixed in the eternal decree for entering on His Public Ministry. Nevertheless, through the long years in which He was apparently doing nothing towards the end for which He came upon earth, His

work was before Him, and He was all the time unceasingly and most effectually engaged upon it. He thus affords us an incontestable proof of the utility of a life passed in prayer and penance. Would He, the Incarnate Wisdom, have spent the whole of His life on earth save the three last years in a manner which was not conducive, in an eminent degree, to the glory of! God and the interests of mankind?

It was in the solitude of Nazareth that the great Apostleship of Prayer commenced. We have seen what Jesus did in that blessed sanctuary. We have watched His exterior employment, and have observed that it was both laborious and commonplace, such as would be the occupation of any poor artisan. Fatigue and weariness, the ordinary accompaniments of continuous hard work, pressed no less heavily upon the Son of God in His Human Flesh than upon any of His creatures, for He would lay nothing upon them, the burden and weight of which He had not first borne Himself.

His labours and His every action were, moreover, regulated by obedience, and this not simply during His childhood and youth, but equally in the maturity of His manhood. Each outward action He performed, each work He wrought, however ordinary in itself, was of infinite value as a prayer, as well as an act of reparation and expiation; yet these were not the principal occupation of His Hidden Life, nor the most important part of its teaching for ourselves.

In the Seventh Meditation of the present work we have meditated upon our Lord's ceaseless Prayer. This was the great work - the work of God - opus Dei - to which He entirely consecrated thirty years of His life, the means by which He negotiated the salvation of the world, and converted souls, no less than by the brilliant works He wrought during His three years' ministry, the eloquent words that fell from His

Sacred Lips, or the sufferings of His Passion. The virtue of those secret supplications which ascended from His Sacred Heart in the silence of Nazareth is being felt throughout the world now, and will continue to be felt until the end of time, and its fruits will remain for eternity. No age, no tribe, no people, no individual soul has been excluded from its embrace, neither has there been any sorrow for which it has not won consolation, nor any temptation which it has not merited grace to overcome. Souls who will not pray for themselves, who stand on the verge of eternal ruin, are snatched from the edge of the precipice by the graces that they owe to the prayer which the Divine Solitary of Nazareth offered up for them, whilst the sweat ran down His face as He toiled, or as He knelt through the silence of the night, praying with "a strong cry and tears, and was heard for His reverence." (Hebrews 5:7)

The fact seems generally lost sight of that the Contemplative Orders have been instituted for a definite end and purpose recognized by the Church, and are prized by it on that very account.

Their object is not exclusively the sanctification of their own individual members. Such sanctification itself has a further definite object, and it is this last which is so constantly ignored by the world at large.

That object generally is synonymous with the one which our Lord Himself had at heart - namely, a desire to restore to God the homage of adoration and reparation of which He has been so sadly defrauded, and to promote the salvation of the world and the spiritual interests of souls. We have seen that the great means by which Jesus attained this end was prayer, along with interior and exterior mortification, and self-denial. Now, this is the thought with which the Holy Spirit has inspired the mind of the Church, and from it have

sprung forth those Contemplative Orders wherein the Life of our Lord at Nazareth is reproduced and perpetuated. Can it then with justice be alleged that the abiding memorial of a life so efficacious for the interests of the Church and of mankind is useless or supererogatory? Is not the imitation of it the highest homage that can be paid to that portion of our Lord's Life which He passed in obscurity, and, is it not at the same time, the most convincing acknowledgment of its utility?

If our Lord had not known the efficiency of such institutions, and if they had not been very pleasing to Him, certainly He would not have inspired His saints to found them, and His Church to approve them. Have we of the nineteenth century attained to greater sanctity than the saints of other ages, or to a higher wisdom than the Church of God possesses, wherein His Spirit of Truth so abides as to preserve her from all error?

In order to assure ourselves of the soundness of the statement made as to the fidelity of the cloistered Orders in representing the Hidden Life of our Lord, we have but to inform ourselves of the manner of life which is led by them. It is no unfrequent idea that monastic life is a species of luxurious idleness, and that persons holding somewhat sentimental views of spirituality, may there find every facility for indulging their peculiar tendencies. But, in fact, precisely the contrary is the real truth. In the religious life every moment of the day is filled up. Each hour has its allotted duty, and in those Orders which most closely resemble the House of Nazareth, these duties may be summed up in two words - prayer and labour, as a good authority tells us, though even, whilst they are at work, they cease not from mental prayer. The interests of the Divine Heart of Jesus form the object towards which all their prayer, and labour, and penance tend; these being the triumph of

the Church, the salvation of souls and of nations, and the propagation of truth and faith throughout the world.

Ceaselessly, in those new Nazareths so ignored by the world, the very prayer of our Lord Himself mounts to Heaven: "That they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." (John 17:3) Had we intended to treat definitely of the work of the Contemplative Orders, much more might have been said to show forth, in its full light, all that the Church so justly appreciates in them with relation to her own interests, as well as all that society in general owes to them in respect of the good that they have done. The present chapter aims simply at showing the analogy which exists between the Hidden Life of our Lord and that led in the Religious Orders, however depreciated by a world that cannot enter into their principles of action or their useful works. Sufficient has already been said for this purpose. We have but to add a few words in reference to another part of the design, which it would seem our Lord had before Him in willing to raise up Religious Orders in His Church, which should in a special manner reproduce His own Hidden Life.

The "Spirit breathes where He wills," giving to each soul the vocation best suited to conduct it to its own sanctification and to the accomplishment of the mission for which it is here upon earth. Now, there are souls who have become enamoured of Jesus for His own sake, the yearning of whose hearts explains itself in a perpetual and secret murmur to the Sacred Heart: That I may know Thee more. This seems to be the centre around which all their other aspirations revolve. They catch glimpses of His beauty in meditation. Now and then the Gospel narratives become illuminated to their eyes, but all too quickly the flash of light is gone, and they long in vain for it again. The world has claims upon them and they must go back to its noise and its turmoil, and its folly; and the memory of that ray of light in their meditation haunts them, and they pine for solitude, that

they may be alone with Him and learn to know Him better. Is this selfishness? Is this sentimentality? Oh! do not say so. It is the whisper of the Spirit; it is the invitation of Jesus to the marriage supper; it is He Himself leading the soul into solitude, that there He may speak to her and make all His beauty known to her. This, however, is not all He wills. When souls who are thus called to the contemplative life, increase in the love of God, there springs up spontaneously within their breast a desire to promote His interests, and then it is that the memory of Nazareth sheds itself over them as a ray of light, indicating the infallible means by which alone they can attain the end desired.

Prayer and Penance, the daily mortification of a common life, subject to all kinds of restraint and subjection, a life wherein self-will can have no part - such are the arms whereby contemplatives fight the battles of the Lord, battles ignored indeed by the world, but well known to God and to His angels.

It was then a loving design of His Providence by which God provided for the souls, above described, a means by which they could at once follow the tendency He Himself had given them towards solitude passed in His Presence, and in labour for the interests of His glory. Happy, then, are those Religious, set apart from all others for the mission of prayer and reparation, to whom has also been given a particular drawing towards meditation on the Hidden Life of Jesus. It will present to them a mirror wherein they may behold the characteristic features of their own daily life in the perfection to which it was raised in Jesus. They will have but to turn their mental vision to Nazareth in order to correct what is defective in their own reproduction of the Life spent in the Holy House. It will be for them a beacon light in seasons of darkness and desolation, a place of rest in the

weariness of temptation, and a tranquil haven of peace and consolation in the endurance of every form of suffering.

Meditation 27 - The Hidden Life of Jesus Reproduced in Hidden Souls

There is a class of persons whose number will never be known until that day which ushers in Eternity, and for those the Hidden Life of our Lord would, if familiar to them, be an abundant source of consolation.

It has been constantly maintained throughout the present little work, that in using the terms hidden souls and hidden life there is no intention of referring only to persons living in any particular state of life, or belonging to any special manner or condition of life. There may be persons who according to their state are called upon to reproduce the Life of Jesus of Nazareth, but who, alas! do not reproduce it; whilst others, placed in the midst of the world, reproduce it perfectly, at least within the secret of their souls.

Now, it is for the latter class that the present meditation is chiefly intended, although it may well be made available for those who are called aside from the crowd, and whose special vocation has placed them in that state which in itself is a perpetuation of Nazareth.

A soul which, independently of state or condition, reproduces within itself our Lord's Hidden Life, is one which for many reasons must be very dear to His Heart.

Among the highest grades of society, as in the more humble classes, Jesus can count His choice souls, and the Church her treasure-houses of spiritual gifts. He has not indeed openly called them apart from the crowd, but He has secretly made them captives of His love and sharers in the sorrows of His own Heart. How many there are who yearn for a solitude

which would afford them readier facilities for prayer and meditation - who long for a mode of life which would remove them from scenes in which they must necessarily take part, and with which the aspirations of their own hearts have no sympathy. Yet, in the inscrutable designs of God, many of these souls are prevented by a combination of circumstances from following their attraction. None know, perhaps, the violence they are doomed to suffer - the inward struggle which again and again they must submit to, if they would keep their wills in subjection to that Sovereign Will which they know by faith has appointed all things.

Others there are who, without possessing precisely the attraction alluded to, yet have become the friends of the Heart of Jesus by drinking of His chalice, so that the world has lost its hold upon them, although they are obliged to dwell in the midst of it. They make no parade of extraordinary piety, they do not withdraw in any marked way from the rest of the world - it would be almost hypocrisy in them to do so, since they value the world only at what it is worth, and therefore have nothing to fear from it. We pass such persons daily in the streets, these hidden friends of God, who go on their way quietly doing good whenever the opportunity crosses their path, yet endeavour to effect it noiselessly, unnoticed, known but to God alone. Such souls live more for others than for themselves. Self-sacrifice is the keynote of their lives.

Again, we meet with others whose souls are possessed by some stupendous, life-long sorrow. When the blow first fell upon them, it well-nigh crushed them beneath its weight, but they revived and grew strong again in the sunshine of God's love, and now they pass on through life chastened, hallowed by the abiding presence of their sorrow, which as a guardian angel keeps them "pure and unspotted from the world" and from the world's spirit. People around them have,

perhaps, some knowledge of their "affliction," as probably they term it; but how many circumstances are there which most likely aggravate its pain and its intensity, of which no one knows but God. These are secrets between God and His friend which do but augment their friendship, and such secrets are all-sanctifying in their influence! Many such hidden sorrows form part of the treasure of the Church, for the friends of the Heart of Jesus quickly learn to consecrate their sufferings to an apostolic end. Thus is perpetually reproduced in the world around us the mystery of the Life of Nazareth, while the world goes on in its folly, little suspecting the mines of spiritual wealth it possesses in its midst.

If these lines should perchance meet the eye of any such souls as have been described, they will understand how to apply what has been said, and to detect the analogy between the Life of the Heart of Jesus at Nazareth and their own inner lives. There are others also, for whom God is providing the materials of becoming hidden souls, but who as yet know not how to avail themselves of their treasure.

Is it without a purpose that our Lord permits certain of His creatures to be frustrated in their most legitimate designs, baffled in their holiest aspirations, misunderstood and blamed through no fault of theirs even by the good? Is it for nothing that those gifted with lofty intellects are sometimes passed over in the schools, while those far beneath them in intellectual power carry away the palm? Happy souls, if only they knew the value of their vocation! Such as these are called to a higher friendship than that of the world; the prize for their victories will be something greater, more enduring than any that would be awarded them on earth; and all that they have panted for here below - their holy designs for the glory of God and for the interests of souls which here have been denied success - will be granted them hereafter, with

"good measure, and pressed down and shaken together, and running over." (Luke 6:38)

Yet, it must be owned, there are many who frustrate God's designs in their regard, many who will not believe because they cannot see. They lose patience in the fire of tribulation, or grow soured beneath humiliation and disappointment, and thus the means, chosen by God for preparing them to reproduce before His eyes the Hidden Life of His Son, are changed into sources of bitterness and regret. To such persons we would quote these beautiful words in the second chapter of the Book of Ecclesiasticus, "Humble thy heart and endure... and make not haste in the time of clouds. Wait on God with patience: join thyself to God and endure.... Take all that shall be brought upon thee, and in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of tribulation."

But all this cannot be done alone. Join thyself to God, to the Hidden God of Nazareth, to His Sacred Heart, and learn of it to endure in silence, and to keep patience until sorrow has effected its chastening work, and then thou shalt know how sweet a thing it is to suffer alone with God, and, unknown to men, to glorify Him in the midst of thy heart, and silently to do His work. Then indeed will you have corresponded with your vocation, O souls, called to a hidden life, modelled on that of Nazareth, and to you it may well be said, "Blessed are ye," for your lot is destined to be among the saints.

Meditation 28 - The Means of Acquiring the Spirit of the Hidden Life

As it has been seen how easily the designs of God may be frustrated by those whom He has especially called to reproduce in themselves the Hidden Life of His Divine Son, it will be well to indicate the means by which they may avoid so great an evil as the loss of their vocation. And that we may understand more clearly how the spirit of the Hidden Life is to be acquired, it will be of service to consider some of the obstacles which lie in its way.

One perhaps of the most formidable of these obstacles is the love of whatever is sensational and exciting, and most gratifying to that restlessness of heart and frivolity of mind which are to be met with everywhere. In order to remedy this, no effort may be spared, and the soul must learn the art of self-discipline. Another obstacle is effusiveness of heart, and an intensified and habitual pre-occupation of the mind upon objects, employments, or amusements which are in themselves insignificant and unworthy of the earnestness with which they are sought after. We are not referring here to objects altogether wrong, but simply to such as are undeserving of the amount of attention and interest so frequently bestowed upon them. Even occupations which are praiseworthy in themselves may become a snare, leading souls away from the end by causing them to become absorbed in the means. Our Lord laboured at Nazareth, and His labour was holy, but He gave to it only the measure of attention required for performing it aright. Not for one instant did it withdraw His all-holy Soul from the Vision of God or from the especial work which was always before Him. Whilst His Hands were toiling, He ceased not to negotiate with His Heavenly Father the grand work of the world's

Redemption. Thus it is that in one of those strictly cloistered Religious Orders which most faithfully reproduce the Life at Nazareth, the Religious are enjoined to labour with their hands, yet are forbidden to occupy themselves with works which require so much attention as would occupy their minds and divert them from the meditation of Divine things.

Now, although certainly all are not called to the same perfection, and persons living in the world cannot be expected to maintain communion with God in the same way as Religious living in their monasteries; yet all rational beings may by the help of ordinary reflection, and that degree of mortification to which every Christian is bound, arrive at giving to Caesar only what is due to Caesar, while they readily grant to God what is His by every kind of right and title.

There is another and an almost universal obstacle to an interior life which has been selected out of innumerable others, on account of its fatal influence in deterring souls from attaining any degree of really intimate friendship with the Divine Heart of Jesus. This enemy of all true spirituality is, in a word, Egotism. The expression, however, is of rather wide application, and we wish to draw attention to one particular feature of it. Perhaps scarcely any person is free from a subtle craving for notice, sympathy, or popularity, all of these being insuperable barriers to acquiring the spirit of the Hidden Life, so long as they remain unmortified in the soul. Not to speak of the grosser forms which this spiritual malady assumes, how many even of those who aim at perfection, and who therefore would not deliberately court popularity or act with the formal intention of winning praise, are nevertheless cut to the heart when public favour runs in another direction, and they are left unnoticed. Others, whom solid virtue has enabled, by God's grace, to bear away victory after victory in the spiritual warfare, are vanquished

at length by the poison of the serpent, insinuating into their mind that their virtue is not appreciated, and that their successes bring them no applause. There are others whose lives have perhaps for years been a succession of continual sorrows - accepted and borne with resignation, yet leaving in their hearts a restless craving for human consolation; they would fain see that their friends appreciated the magnitude of their sufferings and the good dispositions with which they support them.

Others, again, are encompassed with humiliating circumstances, and cannot rest until they have endeavoured to explain away all that is humiliating to them; and well will it be if, in their mistaken anxiety to attain their object, they do not fall into sins of deliberate untruth.

These, and many like forms of egotism which might be enumerated, are fatal enemies to the true solitude of the soul with God, and contentment with that solitude, without which it is useless to think of arriving at intimate friendship with the Sacred Heart, or attaining the spirit of its hidden life.

Are we to suppose, from what has been said, that the Hidden Life of Jesus is impossible of reproduction in souls? This were far from being true, but owing to the infirmity of our nature, it requires constant and generous effort on our part to combat the weaknesses inherent to it. Such combat, however, cannot be maintained alone. We must unite ourselves to God in prayer, not simple prayer of vocal petitions, but rather in meditation upon the Life of our Lord Jesus Christ, and above all on such points in His Life as reveal to us the inner thoughts of His Sacred Heart.

Prayer gives knowledge, and knowledge calls forth love, and love moves to imitation of the object beloved. Yet more than

this. He who loves is contented with the love of the Beloved - desires no other approval of his actions than His - no other sympathy in his sorrows, no other witness than Him of his victories and trials. Far from the souls who have once tasted the sweetness of the spirit of the Hidden Life will be complaint when they are forgotten, passed over, or neglected - far from them any restless craving for the notice or appreciation of others. They have learnt, or rather they have tasted and seen, how sweet a thing it is to live and suffer alone with Jesus. They know how to consecrate, unobserved by the world, their sufferings in His interests, and thus reproduce the Hidden Life of Jesus before the eyes of His Father. O souls, who reject so great a grace, and who, by your egotism and folly, place such barriers to your union with the Heart of the Hidden God of Nazareth, to you may truly be addressed those words of the Prophet: "Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which doth not satisfy you? Hearken diligently... and eat that which is good, and your soul shall be delighted in fatness." (Isaias 54:2)

Meditation 29 - Recompense of a Hidden Life in Sorrow and in the Hour of Death

We have now arrived at the close of the course of meditations written with a desire to familiarize us with the occupations, the sufferings, in a word, the whole Life of the Heart of Jesus during His abode at Nazareth. It remains for us but to consider the immense recompense destined for those who participate in that life according to their various conditions.

Let us, in the first place, recall briefly all we have meditated regarding our Lord in His Hidden Life. Let us, then, attach the eyes of our soul to our Divine Model, no longer, however, toiling with Saint Joseph at Nazareth, but far away from the quiet spot where we have so long contemplated Him, face to face now with the ignominies, the outrages, the sufferings of every kind with which He was assailed in the bitter Passion that preceded His Death.

As we contemplate Him in the midst of those sufferings, which the Gospel has rendered familiar to us all, let us look back to the humiliations and other forms of sufferings, which we have seen Him silently supporting year after year at Nazareth, and let us thence learn how the reward of hidden suffering and interior virtue is reserved for occasions of extraordinary trial.

We behold our Blessed Lord "set at naught by Herod and all his army," and regarded as a fool; and yet for years, He, the Wisdom of the Father, had been accounted of no esteem at Nazareth. We see Him the object of the cruelty, the scorn, the derision of all the people, but His Heart had endured in

silence for three-and-thirty years the same neglect, the same injustice, though in a less visible manner. The memory of Nazareth haunted Him amidst the noise and tumult of the Passion, and the secret humiliations and inward sufferings His Heart had supported there, met their recompense now in the peace, tranquillity, and joy with which it received or rather embraced every outrage.

So also will it be with us if we have striven to unite ourselves to our Lord, leading with Him a life hidden in God. When seasons of greater suffering shall come upon us, the virtues we have laboured to practise secretly, as it were, and without ostentation, the interior habits of sanctity and piety which we have acquired and persevered in, through union with our Lord, will then meet with their reward. They will be our support and our consolation, and the struggles we have sustained, without suspicion, perhaps, of others, the sufferings meekly accepted, and lovingly borne for long years when no one near us knew of them at all, or at least not in proportion to their extent, all these have merited for us special successes, special graces and consolations, which God, in His infinite goodness and in the delicacy of His love, reserved for us until those seasons of more than ordinary suffering should visit us.

Those, then, who have gone down into the secret humiliations of Nazareth, and have suffered silently and perseveringly, in union with the Hidden God, may confidently hope for grace to stand strong in faith beneath the Cross, amidst the more trying ignominies of the Passion.

It is, above all, the approach of death which will prove to us how good it has been to persevere in a hidden life. Let us contemplate our Blessed Lord in His agony on the Cross, and listen to His words there, which, as ever, indicate the occupation of His Sacred Heart. We shall find that they

express the same sentiments, the same desires, the same character as those we have considered in Him at Nazareth.

"Father, forgive them;" these are the words we hear passing from His parched lips - the same prayer which had never ceased to ascend from His Heart, while He toiled in Joseph's workshop. Again, listen to Him as He promised Paradise to the penitent thief, true to the former spirit of His loving Heart, as busy occupying itself with others, as it is unmindful of its own bitter sufferings. In recommending His Blessed Mother to Saint John, and through him to us all, He does but reiterate in word the teaching He had given by example during the hidden years, devotion, namely, to our dearest Lady^ We hear Him announce the thirst that was consuming Him, the thirst for souls which had never ceased to consume His Heart, as He toiled and wept for them in the Holy House. It was His inward occupation also as He hung upon the Cross, and the very ardour of His thirst strengthened Him in His suffering. "My God," He cries, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" It is that old form of adoring love with which His Heart is so familiar, that Heart which we have seen enduring its secret agonies, its unknown trials at Nazareth; and by which it merited for us the grace to persevere in those seasons of especial difficulty when it should be given us to share in His dereliction.

"It is consummated," as He declared. The work of man's Redemption is finished, and the eye of the dying Victim, traversing the sorrow-laden years of His earthly career, pauses at Nazareth. How much of His work had not been accomplished there! And looking back on the secret trials of that long Hidden Life, He saw that no suffering had been spared for the full and perfect carrying out of the immense work which He had undertaken.

Lastly, we hear Him commending His Spirit into His Father's hands, even though that Father had seemed almost without mercy for this His only Son. Nevertheless, with the same confidence and love with which He pursued His hard, painful life at Nazareth, so now He yielded up His Spirit freely and readily. The same motives fired His Sacred Heart now as had animated it through His Life - the glory of His Father - the salvation of His brethren.

How many lessons may we not here draw for ourselves! First, the long accustomed habits of holy obedience, persevered in through life, will be our support and consolation not only in seasons of suffering, but also, and above all, at the hour of death - in our last agony. There is no reference here to sensible consolations, for it is possible that our Lord may ask us to share with Him in His bitter dereliction; but if we have previously cultivated an interior as well as an apostolic spirit, it will cling to us to the last; if we have habitually consecrated our sufferings and sorrows to the interests of the Heart of Jesus, the same spirit of loving self-sacrifice will abide with us, and the thought of Divine reparation, and the thirst for souls, will render our sufferings at the last awful moment not only endurable, but even sweet, inasmuch as we shall regard them as the supreme means of being united to the world's Victim in the consummation of that sacrifice by which He redeemed mankind.

Probably thousands have, in a secondary manner, owed their eternal salvation to the oblation offered by apostolic souls in their last agony. Thousands, also, have derived an inexhaustible source of strength for the supreme trial from the past exercise of their life-long apostolate.

We have alluded to this as the consolation reserved for those who have lived for and alone with the Heart of Jesus, because the union of our hearts with His at the hour of death

will be close and strong in proportion to the union which they have acquired during life. This relation of our hearts to the Heart of our Saviour, this fusion of interests, at the critical moment which is to decide our eternity, will be our recompense for the secret sorrows we have lovingly borne, the temptations we have resisted, the struggles we have sustained, fully contented that God alone should see them.

The hour of death is the triumph of a hidden life, even as Jesus triumphed on the Cross. He who has lived alone with God in the midst of life, will not fear that awful solitude in which the soul must inevitably find itself at death. God has been all in all to it during life, and He will be the same to it in the tremendous hour of its departure. The day, therefore, of death is the commencement of recompense and of triumph for those who have reproduced in themselves the life of the Heart of Jesus of Nazareth. He will not, then, suffer to pass unrewarded any sorrows borne with Him in secret, by the souls for whom He has sufficed through long years of hidden suffering; and it will be given to them to know, in that hour, with an all-sufficient fullness of knowledge, how good it is to rest on the Heart of Jesus. Let us then entreat our Lord to teach us, during life, the secret of living hidden in His Heart, in order that it may be our resting-place at the hour of death.

Meditation 30 - Recompense of a Hidden Life in Eternity

Let us pay a final visit to the Holy House which in spirit we have visited during the course of these meditations, and once more contemplate the Divine Master amidst His daily toil. Let us look again at His weariness, His humility, and His subjection, together with all His interior sufferings, and let us then contemplate Him as He is glorious in His Kingdom, seated at the right hand of His Eternal Father, and receiving those who have merited to be of the number of His redeemed ones. Let us beg an intense and delicate appreciation of a hidden life which conducts to so glorious a recompense as we are about to consider.

Without penetrating too curiously into the various rewards laid up for the servants of God in eternity, or forming ideas regarding Heaven which probably have no reality in fact, we may certainly believe that special rewards are reserved for the different kinds of virtue which have been exercised upon earth in a more eminent degree by individual souls, as well as for the various services they have rendered to God and His Church, or the work they have wrought with a pure intention, or the sufferings which they have either submitted to or embraced for His love. Our Lord Himself distinctly implies this when He announces that in His "Father's house there are many mansions."

Now, how great must the rewards be that are laid up for those who have faithfully endeavoured to reproduce the Hidden Life which the Word Incarnate led on earth during nearly the whole of His sojourn here below - that Life, inglorious indeed in the eyes of the world, unknown even to many of those who would appreciate it if they only knew of

it, but very glorious indeed in the sight of God and His angels, even though reproduced so inadequately by such poor creatures as ourselves.

Let us weigh well the golden words of the *Imitation of Christ*, which so admirably depict a life hidden in God: That which is pleasing to others, shall prosper; that which thou wouldst have, shall not succeed; that which others say, shall be listened to; what thou sayest, shall not be regarded. Others shall ask, and shall receive; thou shalt ask, and shalt not obtain. Others shall be great in the esteem of men, but of thee no one will speak; to others this or that charge shall be committed, but thou shalt be accounted fit for nothing.... And yet consider, son, the fruit of these labours, their speedy end, and their exceeding great reward.... There I will give thee glory in return for the affronts which thou hast suffered; a garment of praise in recompense for thy sorrow; and instead of the lowest place, a royal throne for all eternity. There will the fruit of obedience be made manifest, there will the labour of penance rejoice, and humble subjection shall be crowned.

Happy are they who have understood in time the truth contained in the words which have been quoted. Every struggle they have sustained in secret for the love and glory of their Master shall then meet with its separate reward, every pang secretly endured shall have its own abundant recompense. Then shall hidden sorrows be transformed into everlasting joys, so much the greater according as the sorrows have been borne more silently in union with the Heart of Jesus. Then shall they who on earth have been humbled, forgotten, despised, shine like stars in the firmament of the triumphant Church. These are they who have tasted on earth all the bitterness of martyrdom without sharing in its glory; they have participated in the apostles' solitudes and tears without sharing in the consolation,

sometimes at least, attendant upon a visible apostleship; but it will be revealed, in the great unfolding day, how real was their long inward martyrdom, how efficacious was their hidden mission.

Let us, then, energetically resolve to subdue within ourselves the spirit of the flesh and of the world, so fatal an enemy to a hidden life, for thus shall we reproduce that life within us and merit the special blessedness prepared for its reward.

Although the end we propose to ourselves, in the imitation of our Lord's Hidden Life, ought scarcely to be centred in the reward assured to it hereafter, and certainly cannot be the primary thought in the mind of those whom the Holy Spirit has drawn into the ways of pure, disinterested love; nevertheless, it is beyond doubt permissible even for such, to encourage themselves, in seasons of desolation and trial, to persevere in the life of obscurity, subjection, and interior renunciation which a truly hidden life involves. They may recall to their minds the reward awaiting those who have been content to participate in the abasements of Jesus of Nazareth, and to feel that His love has been all-sufficient for them.

Without presumption, they may look up with the interior eye of their soul to the bright realms above them, and contemplate the place prepared for those who have imitated and shared in the Hidden Life of Jesus, a place so close to His Sacred Heart, because in that Heart they made their dwelling-place by preference upon earth. They will listen to the Voice which has so often whispered to them in solitude during their exile here, and they will recognize its tones. That is the voice of Jesus of Nazareth, once crucified, now glorified, who will say to them: "Come, ye blessed of My Father." "You are they who have continued with Me in My

temptations" (Saint Luke xxii. 28) - you have been contented to remain and suffer with Me in the obscurity of Nazareth. Come, ye martyrs of My Heart, receive the palm of your long secret martyrdom; come, ye hidden apostles, and receive the crown I bestow upon those who on earth have been consumed with zeal for the interests of My Heart; come, ye who, by your own silent imitation, have confessed before men the sublimity of My Hidden Life; come, ye virgin souls, who desire no other love than Mine, no other eye than Mine for the witness of your struggles and your sorrows; come, enter into the everlasting dwelling prepared for you - into My Sacred Heart - the abode you chose on earth, and which shall be your repose, your beatitude, your glory throughout eternity.

O Heart of Jesus of Nazareth, grant us to glorify Thee on earth by the imitation of Thy Hidden Life, that so we may glorify Thee eternally.

Nazareth

Nazareth! What volumes in a word,
What music in a name!

Thrilling the soul with memories
Which tenderest love must claim.

'Twas there for well-nigh thirty years
That dwelt Incarnate God;

Its fair green fields and sunny slopes
His Sacred Feet have trod.

O blessed spot! The chosen rest
Of Saints in every age;

The book in which the Sacred Heart
Shines forth on every page.

O Nazareth! To thy dear shade
Our weary spirits turn,

When restless trials make our hearts
Within us hotly burn.

When one by one shall fade away
The day-dreams of our youth,

We'll dream of thee, sweet Nazareth,
And Him - the Life - the Truth.

The beauty of that Heavenly Flower
Which bloomed upon thy hill,

Has never ceased to hallow thee,
Its perfume haunts thee still.

'Tis there we'll rest with Jesus then.
Far from the world apart,

And contemplate His loveliness,
And read His Sacred Heart.

About This EBook

The text of this ebook was taken from The Heart of Jesus of Nazareth: Meditations on the Hidden Life, third edition, published in 1906. The author is not listed, but the book has the Imprimatur of Bishop John Baptist Butt, Diocese of Southwark, England, 5 February 1890.

The cover image is a detail of the painting *The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane* by Francesco Trevisani, 1740. It is currently in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, Scotland. The image was swiped from Wikimedia Commons.

For more free ebooks, devotional material, and information about the saints of the Church, come see us at

CatholicSaints.Info

- or -

CatholicSaints.Mobi

